Identifying priorities for the EOWDC Scientific Research & Monitoring Panel for research & monitoring of offshore wind farms.

A methodology and proposal prepared for the EOWDC Panel by Frank Grant, FGDS Ltd

1.0   Context

As the EOWDC panel begin their important work related to the Aberdeen Bay development an initial requirement that they have identified is to have a transparent and auditable process and approach to determining priorities in research and monitoring. This paper illustrates an approach that uses a technique that has been widely used in similar high profile instances where these objectives are required and where scrutiny, transparency and auditability of both the process and the outcome are required.

The challenge in this instance is the design of both the process and the stakeholder engagement together with providing the transparency and expertise that make the outcome credible.

2.0   Provenance

The two methodologies applied in this instance are Multi Criteria Decision Analysis [MCDA] and Value Focussed thinking [VFT].

VFT[1] is an approach that focuses decision makers on the values and criteria they will apply to a decision area. It sets aside – in the first instances – the alternatives or options to be considered and develops an approach that I have called 'deciding how to decide'. This means that in any contentious or complex decision the initial work is to determine how you will make the decision and against what criteria will you judge the relative merits of one alternative or option as against another. The criteria and/or values can then be structured into groups and the relative strengths of the criteria as determined by those charged with making the decision are determined – the so called weightings. In some instances the criteria and values are determined by stakeholder engagement where the decision is not their objective but rather the determination of how the decision will be made and against what criteria will the alternatives be judged. The weighting of criteria remains the prerogative of the decision making group informed by the frequency and strength of mention in stakeholder engagement. The engagement can integrate lay and specialist groups to demonstrate consultation, engagement and ownership of the decision making framework.

MCDA[2] is an approach to structuring and evaluating competing bids by comparing their relative merits against a range of weighted criteria. There are no prescribed models of

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[1] Value Focussed Thinking – Ralph Keeney, Harvard Business School
[2] MCDA- the application used in these instances is that developed by Prof L Philips, London School of Economics

evaluation each model is unique to the decision making group and their stakeholders. Using software support the evaluation proves is reflected back to the group in real time

3.0   Applications

To describe the application of this approach a number of examples are outlined.

1. The first was a review of the West of Scotland Cancer Services as the service was becoming unsustainable. In support of the then Medical Director, Dr Adam Bryson, a process of stakeholder engagement of professionals from the five regional health boards were integrated into a process of developing a structured framework to consider options for the service. Both the process and the outcomes were under considerable public scrutiny and the process withstood both the rigour of this scrutiny and that of the Scottish Government's Health sub committee.

    The compelling feature was the level of engagement and integration of the different geographical and professional perspectives into this review and the clarity of the decision process that led to the outcome.

2. The second example is that of the University of the Highlands & Islands and their need as a Strategic Delivery Body [SDB] to consider priorities for capital investment with European funding support. The process designed allowed differing bids to be considered by an evaluation group representing different perspectives from within the stakeholder community and for their deliberations and outcomes to be a matter of public scrutiny and auditability. The outcome withstood the challenge of one unsuccessful bidder because of the transparency and rigour that were demonstrated.

3. North Lanarkshire Council adopted this approach to considering the priorities for investment in urban regeneration projects. Bids were received from Tenant groups across the Council area and a group of lay and professional representatives undertook an evaluation process to determine the priorities for the funding. Although some participants were not successful in their bids they acknowledged and recognised the merits of those that had been successful based on the criteria used to make these decisions. Again a key feature of this work was the integration of both lay and professional perspectives in the one process and the auditability of the process and its outcomes.

4. Other instances include – Maternity & Paediatric Service Reviews; Waste Management priorities in Northern Ireland; Equipment & Services procurement processes; Research priorities; investment priorities; strategic & risk management.

4.0   The Aberdeen Bay challenge

The challenge facing the Panel is developing a credible, transparent and auditable process of engagement, ownership and decision making in a complex area of interdependent and linked sciences across the three distinct phases of operations. As with all decisions asking the right question is key and understanding what the objectives are for both the Panel, its working groups and the wider community are also fundamental.

Currently the question has been established as deciding on the priorities for research and monitoring across a number of themes within the environment. The Panel's first task will be to establish the themes and agree that they are comprehensive enough and inclusive enough to meet the needs of their objectives.

The Panel's initial task will be to define, validate and supplement, if the Panel consider this to be appropriate, these themes. The Panel must also consider the themes within the appropriate time stage as defined by the Panel.

5.0   The Process outline

The following section describes – in outline – the approach to be considered by the Panel to develop a credible, robust and transparent approach to the challenge. This process is modelled on approaches taken elsewhere where scrutiny, engagement and transparency are the principal objectives.

Stage 1 Process Design

The first stage in the process is the design of the process to ensure that objectives are set and that timescales and resource are identified. The process design will also include stakeholder analysis, the stakeholder engagement and the participants to be involved in the final evaluation process.

Stage 2 Engagement

A qualitative approach to engagement will be suggested to the Panel as quantitative representative sampling and engagement will be time onerous, impractical and will not serve any additional benefit. The methodology of engagement and the contribution and utility of the outputs to be adopted will be reviewed with the Panel.

Stage 3 Prioritising Workshop

A workshop will be facilitated with the Panel to agree the value and criteria framework based on their expertise. This workshop will determine the structure and weightings of the criteria to be used in determining the priorities – the deciding how to decide element will now be complete.

Using this evaluative framework an evaluation of thematic priorities will be undertaken and a range of priorities established. The Group can test their outputs with sensitivity testing of the process.

The output will then be deemed to be the priorities for research and monitoring themes that the Panel has established.

Stage 4 Report

The final output will be a report of the process, those engaged, the framework used for evaluation and the evaluation outputs from the Panel to establish a range of priorities for the research & monitoring objectives.

6.0   Process Summary

The process of determining priorities can be summarised by the following Figure 1 where the Themes are articulated and defined; a process of developing the evaluative framework is then completed and the Panel finally use the MCDA model to identify their priorities based on the evaluative framework.

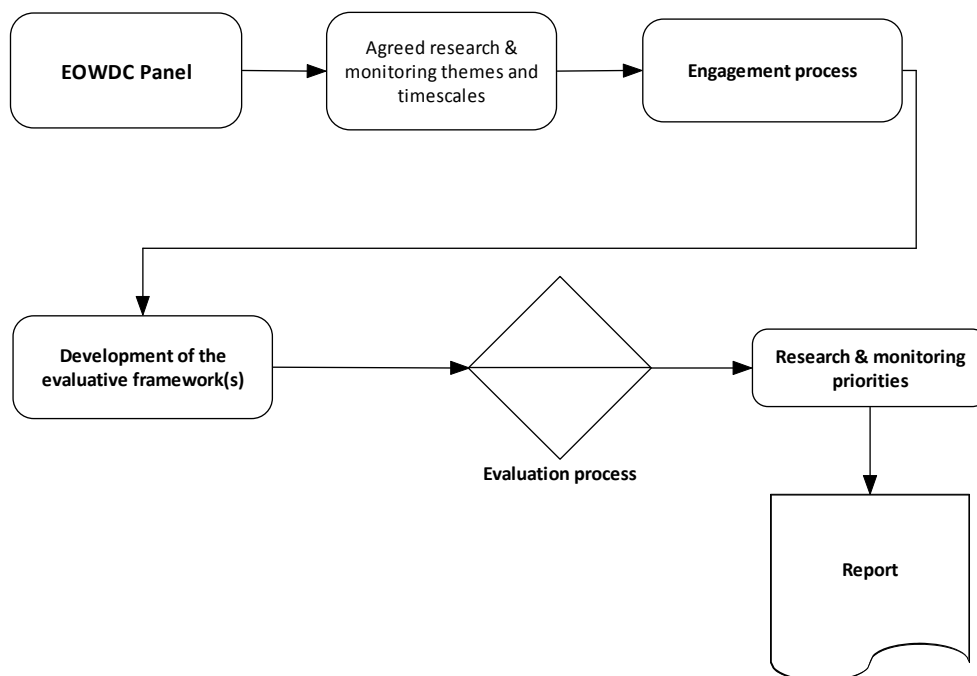The following Figure 1   outlines the overall process.

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│              │      │ Agreed research &│      │                  │
│ EOWDC Panel  │─────▶│ monitoring themes│─────▶│ Engagement process│
│              │      │   and timescales │      │                  │
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│ Development of the│        ◇ Evaluation ◇         │Research & monitoring│
│ evaluative        │──────▶ ◇  process  ◇ ────────▶│    priorities      │
│ framework(s)     │        ◇            ◇          │                    │
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                                                        │  Report  │
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Figure 1

Costs

EOWDC Prioritisation process

Time Sheet

Description	Time	Cost
Process Design	1	
Engagement briefing papers	1.5	
Evaluation workshop	1	
Report	1.5	
		£3,200.00

Excl VAT and travel expenses charged at cost