

The Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute

Capability statement

The Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) is a non-departmental body with its headquarters in Belfast. The institute is sponsored by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) in Northern Ireland. The work of AFBI spans the agri-food sector, veterinary science and marine science. In addition to DARD, AFBI's customers include other government departments and agencies, scientific, business and Non-Governmental Organisations.

Within AFBI, marine science is delivered by the Fisheries and Aquatic Ecosystems Branch. The branch has a compliment of 53 staff. Three integrated marine programmes undertake statutory monitoring and R&D on fish and shellfish stocks, ecosystem structure and functioning and coastal zone science. Collaboration with staff in other branches (economics, analytical chemistry and chemical surveillance) allows the marine staff to undertake a broader R&D remit.

The marine science undertaken by AFBI is strongly applied. It is designed to provide the evidence base to support Northern Ireland (DARD, DOE) and UK (Defra) fisheries and environmental policies, and to support NI and the UK in meeting their commitments under European Directives and transnational agreements such as the Oslo and Paris Convention (OSPAR). AFBI is a member of the UK Marine Science Coordination Committee (MSCC). AFBI scientists contribute to the UK Marine Monitoring and Assessment Strategy (UKMMAS), UK-IMON and internationally through the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES), OSPAR, the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) and Scientific Committee on Ocean Research (SCOR).

AFBI undertakes statutory fish and shellfish stock assessments, sea-bed habitat and essential fish habitat mapping, marine spatial planning. This is supported by a comprehensive R&D programme. We maintain long-term time-series of physical variables, inorganic nutrients, and phytoplankton (using instrumented moorings located in the western Irish Sea and inshore water of Northern Ireland), zooplankton (including larval fish and gelatinous zooplankton) and benthic communities. AFBI also has a role in Northern Ireland's marine emergency planning and response. The Institute has strong links with Cefas, other UK marine institutes, universities and the Marine Institute in the Republic of Ireland.

Resources

AFBI has well-equipped specialist laboratories and comprehensive IT facilities. Our purpose-built 52 m research vessel, RV *Corystes*, is used to support our seagoing activities. The vessel spends some 200 days at sea in the Irish Sea and adjacent sea areas. For inshore work, AFBI has a dedicated 7 m rigid hull inflatable (MCA coded to 20 nautical miles).