



Sustainable Blue  
Economy Partnership

# Unified Paths to a Climate- Neutral, Sustainable, and Resilient Blue Economy: Engaging Civil Society, Academia, Policy, and Industry

Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership

2024

Co-branded by



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EUROPEAN PARTNERSHIP

## 2024 Joint Transnational Co-Funded Call

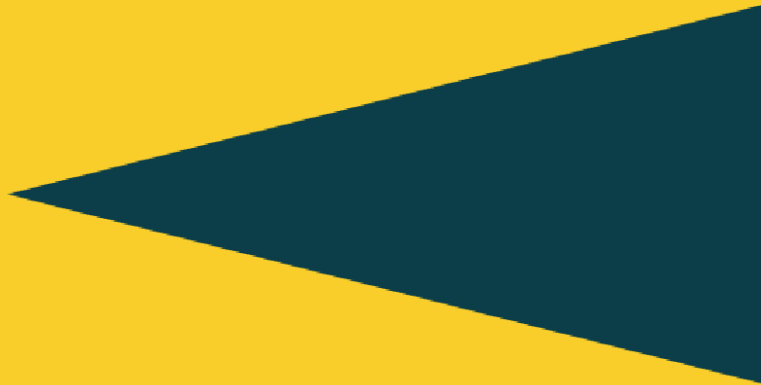
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### Versions

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V1	07/02/2024	Update of RCN budget in Table 1
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## 1.0 CONTEXT AND OBJECTIVES OF THE JOINT CALL

The Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership (SBEP) is a Research and Innovation (R&I) Partnership started in 2022 under the Horizon Europe Programme. The vision of this European Partnership is to design, steer and support a just and inclusive transition to a regenerative, resilient, and sustainable blue economy. The SBEP intends to boost the transformation needed towards a climate-neutral, sustainable, productive, and competitive blue economy by 2030 while creating and supporting the conditions for a healthy ocean for the people by 2050.

The SBEP aims to deliver solutions to strengthen European Union (EU) and international science-policy interfaces in marine- and maritime-related domains of the EU Green Deal and Digital Europe strategies through aligning national, regional, and EU R&I priorities and bringing together science, industry, policy, and civil society. In addition, it will contribute to the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030<sup>1</sup> and Nature Restoration Law<sup>2</sup>, the Farm to Fork Strategy<sup>3</sup>, the EU mission “Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030”<sup>4</sup>, the Circular Economy Action Plan<sup>5</sup>, the zero pollution ambition and the transformation of Europe’s blue economy towards climate-neutral status by 2050, as also reflected in the communication on a new approach for a sustainable blue economy in the EU “Transforming the EU’s Blue Economy for a Sustainable Future”<sup>6</sup>.

Europe has a historic relationship with the sea, as almost half of the EU population lives less than 50 Km from the sea<sup>7</sup>. For instance, in 2019, the EU blue economy directly employed close to 4.50 million people, generating more than €671,3 billion in turnover. However, due to the global crisis caused by COVID-19, the total turnover decreased by 22% in 2020 (€523 billion) and employment

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<sup>1</sup> [https://environment.ec.europa.eu/strategy/biodiversity-strategy-2030\\_en](https://environment.ec.europa.eu/strategy/biodiversity-strategy-2030_en)

<sup>2</sup> [https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/nature-and-biodiversity/nature-restoration-law\\_and\\_and Nature restoration: Council and Parliament reach agreement on new rules to restore and preserve degraded habitats in the EU - Consilium \(europa.eu\)](https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/nature-and-biodiversity/nature-restoration-law_and_and_Nature_restoration:_Council_and_Parliament_reach_agreement_on_new_rules_to_restore_and_preserve_degraded_habitats_in_the_EU_-_Consilium_(europa.eu))

<sup>3</sup> [https://food.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2020-05/f2f\\_action-plan\\_2020\\_strategy-info\\_en.pdf](https://food.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2020-05/f2f_action-plan_2020_strategy-info_en.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> [https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe/eu-missions-horizon-europe/restore-our-ocean-and-waters\\_en](https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe/eu-missions-horizon-europe/restore-our-ocean-and-waters_en)

<sup>5</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1583933814386&uri=COM:2020:98:FIN>

<sup>6</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2021%3A240%3AFIN>

<sup>7</sup> Paiva, J. (2021) Maritime domains and Europe’s ambitions: storm on the horizon? The view from Lisbon. <https://blog.sciencespo-renoble.fr/index.php/2021/10/27/maritime-domains-and-europe-s-ambitions-storm-on-the-horizon-the-view-from-lisbon/>

decreased by 26% (3.34 million people) compared with 2019. In addition, the Russian invasion in Ukraine has affected the blue economic sectors in various ways, from increases in oil and marine diesel prices, to trade restrictions and supply chain bottlenecks. The continuous impact on the different sectors of the blue economy will depend on the extent and duration of the conflict<sup>8</sup>. Nevertheless, the UN Global Compact ‘Blue Resilience Brief’<sup>9</sup> highlights how the challenges presented by the pandemic can advance science-industry collaboration to achieve a more resilient and sustainable recovery of the blue economy.

A study commissioned by the World Ocean Initiative predicts that the ocean can sustainably provide six times more food than it does today through better management and technological innovation<sup>10</sup>. On top of that, research has shown that restoring and protecting the world's large marine ecosystems would not only result in a healthier ocean, with associated positive impacts for coastal communities and livelihoods, but also transform several maritime sectors resulting in significant opportunities for job creation<sup>11</sup>. The potential of a climate-neutral and sustainable blue economy to deliver innovation, value creation and employment is high, and its role in addressing challenges as articulated in the European Green Deal and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, such as energy security, healthy productive and biodiverse ecosystems, human and animal health and well-being, climate change and sustainable food provision is considerable<sup>12</sup>.

The 2024 Joint Call is the second Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership call, bringing together financial resources at both national and regional levels, facilitated by Participating Funding Organisations (PFOs) from 26 countries and, with additional financial backing from the European Union. These PFOs play a crucial role in funding research and innovation initiatives related to the blue economy.

The Intervention Areas of the Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership link the high-level Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda (SRIA) and the practical implementation through R&I calls and other activities. They provide actionable routes and concrete steps to approach the range of

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<sup>8</sup> European Commission (2023). The EU Blue Economy Report. 2023. Publications Office of the European Union. Luxembourg.

<sup>9</sup> <https://oceandecade.org/assets/uploads/documents/Towards-a-More-Resilient-and-Sustainable-Blue-Economy-sept20-1598949409.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Costello, C., L. Cao, S. Gelcich et al. 2019 The Future of Food from the Sea. Washington, DC: World Resources Institute.

<sup>11</sup> Hudson, A. (2017) Restoring and Protecting the world's large marine ecosystems: An engine for job creation and sustainable economic development. Environmental Development 22: 150-155 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envdev.2016.10.003>

<sup>12</sup> Stuchtey, M., A. Vincent, A. Merkl, M. Bucher et al. 2020. “Ocean Solutions That Benefit People, Nature and the Economy.” Washington, DC:

World Resources Institute. [www.oceanpanel.org/ocean-solutions](http://www.oceanpanel.org/ocean-solutions).

challenges, tensions, and opportunities that the Blue Economy is facing. Four Intervention areas were defined as the basis for Partnership activities for 2024: Digital Twins of the Ocean, Blue Economy Sectors, Managing Sea Uses, and Blue Bioresources<sup>13</sup>. These areas point to the need for R&I activities and investments that, each in their own way, support the necessary transition into a green and digital ocean economy.

This call is co-branded as part of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, which is coordinated by UNESCO’s Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC/UNESCO) on behalf of the UN system, with the aim that the selected funded research and innovation projects are endorsed as Ocean Decade projects. The UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (the Ocean Decade) is calling for a transformation in the generation and use of ocean research. To reverse the cycle of decline in ocean health, the Ocean Decade strives for an increased understanding and sustainable management of the ocean, seas, and coasts. To that effect, it provides a convening framework for scientists and stakeholders from diverse sectors to co-design and co-deliver the scientific knowledge and the partnerships needed to accelerate advances in ocean science. The Ocean Decade has a focus on inclusive and transformative science and aims to ensure that no one is left behind.

The development of the knowledge and solutions needed to underpin a transition to a sustainable ocean economy is one of ten Ocean Decade Challenges that the Decade aims to achieve by 2030. The UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development is co-branding this call as a means of stimulating new initiatives in co-designed and co-delivered knowledge and solutions for a sustainable ocean economy as part of the Ocean Decade Action Framework.

The co-branding of this call with the Ocean Decade will ensure that funded projects that are endorsed as Decade Actions form part of a highly visible, shared, global effort that opens up opportunities to create new collaborations across disciplines, geographies and generations, and to establish access to new sources of support.

Evaluation of applications to this call will involve, as an observer, the Decade Coordination Unit that is housed within IOC/UNESCO, the UN agency leading implementation of the Decade. The

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<sup>13</sup> ‘The Partnership Intervention Areas for activities in 2024’ [www.bluepartnership.eu/news/partnership-intervention-areas-activities-2024](http://www.bluepartnership.eu/news/partnership-intervention-areas-activities-2024).

involvement of the DCU will allow to estimate if the selected research projects align with the endorsement criteria for Decade Actions.

Proponents of endorsed Decade Actions will be able to use the Ocean Decade branding in their communications and awareness-raising activities in accordance with Decade Brand Guidelines keeping in mind that the beneficiaries must respect the obligation to put the EU emblem and the other logos of the national funding agencies which are funding the project. Furthermore, proponents of the successful proposals will be invited to become members of the Ocean Decade Network. DCU will take care during the evaluation process to evaluate and attribute the endorsement as UN Ocean Decade Actions. Projects proposed for funding should contribute to the following endorsement criteria of the UN Ocean Decade which are shared with the objectives of the EU SBEP Initiative:

- Contribute to one or more Decade Challenges and one or more Decade objectives;
- Accelerate the generation or use of knowledge and understanding of the ocean, with a specific focus on knowledge that will contribute to the achievement of the SDGs and complementary policy frameworks and initiatives;
- Are co-designed and/or co-delivered by knowledge generators and users, and thus facilitating the uptake of science and ocean knowledge for policy, decision-making, management and/or innovation;
- Ensure that all data and resulting knowledge are provided in an open access, shared, discoverable manner;
- Strengthen existing or creates new partnerships across nations and/or between diverse ocean actors, including users of ocean science;
- Overcome barriers to diversity and equity, including gender, generational and geographic diversity;
- Collaborate with and engage local and indigenous knowledge holders.

Further information on the Ocean Decade and the endorsement process can be found here: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000377082.locale=en>



## 2.0 JOINT CALL DESCRIPTION

### 2.1 Requirements

Projects in this call must be impact-driven contributions to the transformation into a blue economy for a more resilient future and towards carbon neutrality targets, following an impact pathway approach (see section 2.3 – Impact of the proposals, and Annex A).

One of the SBEP expectations to be achieved for the 7-year duration of this European Partnership is the direct involvement of quadruple-helix<sup>14</sup> (4-H) stakeholders in the projects to be funded by this partnership. Thus, following this SBEP ambition, a requirement for all applications is to involve a broad range of scientific disciplines, industry partners, society, and policy stakeholders to meet the quadruple-helix collaboration ambition. Each consortium should have at least one partner from the quadruple-helix and a description of how their proposal meets this ambition. Stakeholder engagement from the quadruple-helix in the research projects will be positively evaluated to enhance innovation, policy, and societal relevance and ultimately, to increase the impact of the projects.

Applications should describe how they relate to the different EU policies described in the context and objectives of the Joint Call (1.0). The proposals are expected to consider a minimum of two European sea basins and to assess the project proposal impact on various basins. Proposals can target European regional seas such as Adriatic Sea, Aegean Sea, Arctic, Barents Sea, Celtic Sea, etc. but they must be from a minimum of 2 different European Sea basins which are: the Baltic Sea, the Black Sea, the Mediterranean Sea, the North Sea and the Atlantic Ocean. At the regional level, complementarities, and synergies with the lighthouses of the EU Mission ‘Restore our Oceans and Waters’ will be requested with their ongoing projects and also on joint possible valorisation of the outcomes of the projects. The users of the outcomes should be identified in the application and involved from the outset. Portfolios of projects will be developed by clustering

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<sup>14</sup> A quadruple-helix collaboration (‘QHC’) is a form of collaboration in research and development between the four major sectors of society: industry, government, research institutes, and the public. For more information, please consult the report entitled ‘Quadruple Helix Collaborations in Practice: Stakeholder Interaction, Responsibility and Governance’ from RICONFIGURE (<https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/documents/downloadPublic?documentIds=080166e5e4d98f00&appId=PPGMS>)

projects which are addressing the same topics and issues wherever the funding are coming from to increase cooperation between different projects and to contribute faster to promote marine solutions to reach carbon neutrality.

As this partnership falls under Horizon Europe Programme, all proposals must be aligned accordingly with the EU Taxonomy<sup>15</sup>. Research and Innovation (R&I) produces the technologies and solutions of tomorrow and will therefore play an important role to help economic actors reach or go beyond the standards and thresholds set in the EU Taxonomy and help keeping the Taxonomy criteria up to date and consistent with the European Green Deal objectives. The EU Taxonomy sets performance thresholds (referred to as ‘technical screening criteria’) for economic activities that:

- *Make a substantial contribution to at least one of six environmental objectives*
- *Do no significant harm (DNSH) to the other five objectives, and;*
- *Meet minimum social safeguards such as the OECD Guidelines on Multinational Enterprises and the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.*

## 2.2 Priority areas

The second Joint Co-funded Call within the Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership is entitled “Unified Paths to a Climate-Neutral, Sustainable, and Resilient Blue Economy: Engaging Civil Society, Academia, Policy, and Industry” and encompasses all the four Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership Intervention Areas (IAs) converted for this call into four priority areas as follows:

- Priority area 1: Digital Twins of the Ocean (DTO) at regional sub-basin scale
- Priority area 2: Blue economy sectors, development of marine multi-use infrastructures
- Priority area 3: Planning and managing sea-uses at the regional level

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<sup>15</sup> The EU Taxonomy Regulation adopted in June 2020 is a tool that will help investors, industry and researchers to navigate the transition to a sustainable economy by providing a science-based classification system to determine whether an economic activity is environmentally sustainable. [https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/news/all-research-and-innovation-news/research-and-innovation-heart-eu-taxonomy-2021-04-21\\_en](https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/news/all-research-and-innovation-news/research-and-innovation-heart-eu-taxonomy-2021-04-21_en) and [https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-04/ec\\_rtd\\_research-innovation-eu-taxonomy.pdf](https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-04/ec_rtd_research-innovation-eu-taxonomy.pdf)

- Priority area 4: Blue Bioresources

### **2.2.1 Digital Twins of the Ocean (DTOs) at regional sub basin scale**

DTOs, in SBEP, are developed at the sub-sea basin scale. They are local components of the whole EU system on DTO, in cooperation with the mission lighthouse. By nature, they are multidisciplinary approaches to answering local stakeholders’ needs. They aim at assessing the short to long-term consequences of current decisions with the help of 30/50 years forecasting models, for instance to estimate the potential impacts of climate change such as sea level rise, changes in sediment load and hydrodynamics, seafloor evolution, ecosystem states to multiple stressors, including the benthic-pelagic coupling. They should support the adaption of measures by managers, policy makers, industries, and citizens to mitigate environmental, industrial, and socio-economic risks.

The objective of DTOs is to build realistic digital representations which include the main processes of the targeted marine ecosystems. By combining mechanistic modelling approaches and data-driven models (hybrid models), DTO applications will allow users to build scenarios of the effects of natural processes and anthropogenic activities on the marine environment and blue economy activities. EU-co-funded DTOs should be designed in such a way as to support EU policy implementation and to help achieve EU policy objectives, in all relevant areas including environment, climate, energy, fisheries, transport. Specific policies which should benefit from DTO applications include the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, Marine Spatial Planning, Common Fisheries Policy and the new approach for a Sustainable Blue Economy.

**Study areas in the regional sea-basins must be** selected based on the accuracy and availability of information for the proposed coastal areas. That may include the existing data of essential systems and their interactions such as: circulation and currents, waves, tides, seabed and sediments, coasts and estuaries, pollution levels, main trophic web components, ecosystems interactions, and socio-economic activities and impacts, inland water inputs, etc... Appropriate spatial and temporal scales retained must be justified.

**The following targeted research directions, to be considered in the project formulation, are presented hereafter. A project needs, at a minimum, to address one or more of the following points including a multi-actor approach:**

- *Mapping and understanding the request of actors of the relevant communities (policymakers, managers, industries, citizens...) to define joint scenarios of the evolution of coastal ecosystems. Possible outputs for societal and economic benefits of a sustainable management of the sea-based activities to fulfil stakeholder requirements;*
- *Existing data collection and representation: Analysis of the available information, quality control and standard format of datasets to improve regional databases. Identifying and assessing data gaps and quantification uncertainties;*
- *Ecological Modelling of the key elements of the systems: Analysis of the existing ecological modelling, intercomparing existing models, selection of sets of coherent and suitable integrated models with development of new models, if necessary, including artificial intelligence (AI). Testing and validation of predictions models and visualisation of the outputs of the models for communication will be welcome;*
- *Propose a new monitoring scheme with new or existing sensors to fill previously identified data gaps and reduce uncertainty. Development of new sensors and techniques are eligible.*

DTO development in the sea/oceanic-basin will be in complementarity to the lighthouses of the Mission “Restore our Oceans and Waters by 2030”, EDITO ([European Digital Twin Ocean - EDITO](#)) and ILIAD projects (<https://www.ocean-twin.eu>). If projects collect in-situ data and marine observations, beneficiaries must make them openly available through the European Marine Observation and Data network (EMODnet)<sup>16</sup> and/or through the EDITO data lake and with other similar national or regional initiatives, based on FAIR (findable, accessible, interoperable, reusable) principles. Duplication with Copernicus Marine Services ([Home | CMEMS \(copernicus.eu\)](#)) and other operational services should be avoided. When relevant in function of the location and the regional issues of the DTO, it will be requested to make connections with the partnership Water4All, to consider inputs from the watershed and to be connected to their data sharing tools. Furthermore, close scientific and expert cooperation and coordination are requested to ensure appropriate timing, complementarities, convergence, and interoperability

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<sup>16</sup> EMODnet Ingestion ([emodnet-ingestion.eu](https://www.emodnet-ingestion.eu))

with other ongoing and planned DTO SBEP initiatives and other EU initiatives such as the EU Mission ‘Restore our Ocean and Waters’ and its lighthouses and the Water4All partnership data sharing activities.

## 2.2.2 Blue economy sectors, development of marine multi-use infrastructures

The ocean industries are facing common challenges to boost their development including sustainability, safety in operation, and green and cost-efficient solutions. They are also facing new challenges to contributing to decreasing greenhouse gas emissions and promoting solutions for climate mitigation and adaptation. In this broad landscape, the objective of this priority area is to boost technological innovations covering the entire blue economy sector in agreement with a green and digital transition. The development of multi-use infrastructures and activities at sea is one of the solutions which is expected to minimise conflicts of interests for the demand of space, to increase sustainability.

The Blue Economy sectors involve a multi-actor social-ecological system. The projects need to engage the different actors of the sectors including industrial partners and other relevant stakeholders. They should also include regulatory and legal aspects, economic and social aspects with social acceptance of the developments for existing and emerging sectors, socio-economic considerations for a just transition, and broad and inclusive approaches. Cross-sectoral issues need new approaches to demonstrate cumulative effects of co-existence of activities on environmental impacts including biodiversity but also safety, security, and risks.

- **Transition of the Blue Economy:** *Emphasise technology and process development, solution orientation, and integrated approaches promoting minimising the pollution and circularity to develop the sustainable Blue Economy taking into consideration climate change, natural hazard challenges and biodiversity crisis. Projects should plan a clear path from new knowledge to innovative services and/or products. Nature-based solutions (NBS) will be promoted to reduce carbon emissions. Projects should address social, economic and environmental challenges which comprise actions to protect, conserve, restore, sustainably use and manage coastal and marine ecosystems.*

The following points are focused for this call:

- *Tools, techniques, processes, risks with proposed Nature-Based Solutions with a focus on seaweed; sea grasses, shellfish and low-trophic fish;*
  - *Perform economic studies including markets opportunities and business models for the proposed innovative solutions;*
  - *Rapid recent changes in energy systems highlight, on one side, the necessary reduction of energy, and the necessity to promote circularity and, on the other side, large development of carbon neutral energy sources with great expansion of large offshore windfarms along the coastline with fixed or floating systems. Their environmental impacts need further investigations to find remediation solutions to alleviate their negative impacts (marine habitats and ecosystems, migration routes for birds, marine mammals, fishes...);*
  - *Decommissioning options in existing and upcoming platforms of the energy including business models to facilitate the re-use of installations addressed from a legal, environmental, social and economic perspective;*
  - *Innovations for reducing environmental footprints with the development of new materials that are carbon frugal and NBS compatible, and to mitigate the impacts of new installations and of options for future decommissioning when installation, maintenance and reuse and recycling of materials.*
- 
- ***Improve co-existence and multi-use infrastructures.*** *In view of the increasing demand for space, activities and functions at sea, multi-use spatial concepts, including multi-use infrastructures, bring a potential for synergistic benefits for associated sectors.*  
*At the same time, the risk of conflicts and negative environmental effects needs to be minimised. Any multi-use of installations or space increases the complexity compared to a ‘single use’ situation and requires more studies on respective and cumulative impacts. Increasing the development of multi-use structures could deliver synergistic benefits for the different uses including for industrial sectors. Respective cost-benefit analysis is necessary to understand and valorise economic and social value chain to contribute to the decision process for a wider benefit for society. In conjunction, the social acceptance, and proposed solutions to solve competition or conflicts between the different users of the multi-use platforms or their surroundings will be important components to succeed in the multi-use’s offshore platform developments. Crowding of space may result in industrial activities moving to further offshore areas such as desalinisation of sea water, hydrogen*

*production... In parallel climate change will generate a riskier environment for marine and maritime activities with more frequent extreme events.*

The following points are focused for that call:

- *Mechanisms to permit the development of sustainable and safe coexistence of several functions and activities within the legal, economic, social, managerial, and policy context;*
- *Combination of infrastructure, functions, and logistics: for example, energy produced at sea could be used for aquaculture farms, hydrogen production, desalinisation (subject to environmental impact assessment), and hydrogen could be used as a vector to transfer energy on shore, or to refuel ships propelled by hydrogen;*
- *Innovation and technological development of multi-uses structures must fit with the 4R conceptual approach: Reduce, Recycle, Reuse and Resistance to extreme environmental conditions;*
- *Combination with multi-uses platforms and regulation of fisheries, aquaculture activities and biodiversity conservation: No Take Zones (NTZ), Marine Protected Areas (MPA), Nature-Based solutions such as artificial reefs.... Association of active economic uses with nature and ecological functions including ecosystem services will be promoted. Integration of the EU Do No Significant Harm (DNSH) principle will be mandatory;*
- *Cumulative effects of the different offshore industries on the environment, such as the release of contaminants, or underwater noise and light pollution. Importance for impacts on biological components for associated aquaculture of healthy products and biodiversity conservation;*
- *Integrated models of the environmental conditions and the interactions between the different uses should be suitable to support decision-makers and industry and to propose options to reduce the different impacts;*
- *Development of monitoring and control systems for real time management of the multiuse platform including extreme events and potential accidents and spills for prevention and reduction of environmental damages.*

Connection with projects from the ‘Mission Restore our Oceans and Waters’ and Water4All or Biodiversa+ partnerships will be established to avoid duplication. The projects will be

complementary to the Clean Energy Transition Partnership (CETP) focusing on high TRL (Technology Readiness Level) technologies. Direct engagement with stakeholders from industrial sectors and policy makers are encouraged to represent their willingness of development.

### **2.2.3 Planning and managing sea-uses at the regional level**

Innovative support for planning and managing Marine Spatial Planning (MSP), here below called ‘MSP initiative’, aims to resolve conflicting uses, and to minimise the respective impacts on marine ecosystems, at the regional levels. It addresses the need to develop innovative tools and approaches to the sustainable planning and management of sea-uses, interlinking maritime spatial planning (MSP), the marine strategy framework directive (MSFD), the Common Fishery Policy (CFP), and the marine protected areas (MPAs)/ Habitats and Birds Directives and Nature Restoration Law, in achieving Europe’s objectives of decarbonisation. The overarching goal of this priority area is to support science-based international decisions that consider environmental status, the legacy of human impacts, climate change trends, the development of the blue economy and future scenarios, considering multitude of pressures from the uses of marine space and marine resources.

The objective is to promote a new approach by integrating the national and/or local initiatives at the EU regional sea-basins level and the Atlantic Ocean-basin between the different bordering countries. It includes the common evolution of coastal environments for the identification of suitable areas for different uses, minimising conflicts, and maximising sustainable development.

The relevant scale of the SBEP MSP initiative must be well-defined and justified. It will have to be co-designed with competent authorities from local, regional and national structures of different countries. Participation of other stakeholders will be positively considered. Cross-border cooperation between different countries and close interaction with all relevant sectors at the regional/ national level will be mandatory to obtain a consensual integrated MSP at the basin or sub-basin scale. The projects will need to build and reflect on previous (local) MSP developed in the area.

**The following targeted research directions, to be explored in the project formulation, are presented hereafter. A project needs, at a minimum, to address one or more of the following points, including a multi-actor approach:**



- **Fostering the full use of scientific knowledge for effective management and conservation**

*Innovative research on this topic will provide essential data for the identification of suitable areas for diverse uses, minimising conflicts. Ecosystem-based management, including MSP, requires high-resolution mapping of marine underwater morphology, and marine uses. It also requires the quantification of indicators describing ecosystem distribution, health and pressures caused by human uses, and ecosystem services, which will provide essential tools for ecosystem health assessment, spatial management of the marine domain, and implementation of restoration measures. All the physical and biological impacts will be analysed regarding to recent innovative results on sound effect on populations. The temporal evolution of the monitored variables, either abiotic (seafloor morphology, sediment dynamics, etc.) or biotic (community structure, and function, biodiversity hotspot.) are relevant for MSP, and other marine policies, notably the MSFD. Research will include the effects of the harm caused by diverse types of marine litter and alternative proposals of remediation will be welcome to be included in the MSP strategy.*

- **Changing environmental scenarios**, co-designed with the relevant authorities, will be proposed, addressing climate change effects such as sea level rise, and shifting risks of coastal flooding. The time horizon should not be less than the next 50 years with application at the local level of (/downscaling from) International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) scenarios. The respective impacts of extreme events, erosion, sedimentation, subsidence, etc., on human activities will be forecasted to be integrated into the MSP initiative. Consequences of future changes of nutrients inputs to the maritime area will be analysed in relation to the future applicable regulations of the EU Common Agriculture Policy. Expected trends in the relevant freshwater hydrological regimes such as the increase of droughts in relation to climate change are important elements, for which the changes in ecosystem productivity of estuaries and coastal areas, should be addressed. These cumulative impacts will include changes of inputs from watershed to the coastal zone.

- **Biodiversity conservation and restoration**: In line with the Global Biodiversity Framework, ratified worldwide, the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, and the EU Mission ‘Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030’, all European countries are committed to increase the surface of their Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) with a target of 30% of its marine area protected, including 10% with a high level of protection. In addition, the Nature

*Restoration Law (NRL) proposes binding targets to stop biodiversity loss in the EU. It aims to establish restoration measures on at least 20% of all EU land and sea areas by 2030, and support Member States and its regions to integrate NRL adaptation while promoting nature-based solutions and ecosystem-based adaptation. The identification of the biodiversity hotspots to be protected is a main issue, as well as the implementation of an effective management to achieve this requirement for our continental European coasts, integrated approaches of that factor, in marine and coastal biodiversity conservation, permit avoiding harmful uses in, but also at the vicinity of the MPAs. Explore transboundary scenarios and multi-lateral solutions for international protected areas that could be proposed for highly mobile species and shared populations. Previous studies have demonstrated that connectivity of MPAs is an important element to maintain genetic diversity and to include all the stages of the life history of sessile species such as spawning grounds, nurseries, etc. The MSP initiative should address how ecological corridors between different MPAs are proposed to maintain genetic diversity. All the targets to maintain and to restore marine and coastal biodiversity should be integrated, at the proper scale, in the MSP initiative.*

- **All marine activities in the regional sea-basins** will consider the sectoral aspects of marine and maritime space management: fisheries management, aquaculture zone, navigation, sediment removal, offshore wind farms, oil and gas extraction but also tourism, etc. A specific attention will be on overexploited fish populations with spatial component in the development of suitable population dynamics models to support a better sustainable management of sensitive fish species for recovery. The development of activities on land in these coastal zones, such as: industries, harbours, coastal cities, tourism, recreation, MPAs, terrestrial aquaculture, and agriculture effects etc., have to be estimated and evaluated with their potential impacts and quality requirements. The legacies of past impacts and their long-term effects on coastal environments in association with the possible future of these activities have to be considered in development scenarios. Therefore, industrial plants and their associated impacts (e.g., dumping sites) must be not ignored. Research may be undertaken to better implement integrated economical, ecological, and social impacts with indicators to measure the respective impacts in marine ecosystem management tools. Co-design, co-development, and co-use with MSP competent authorities at national and regional levels will ensure direct capitalisation of

*results and widen the information basis available to relevant authorities, particularly by including socio-economic data sources (DCR, regional and national data, Eurostat, OCDE).*

- **Space-based remote sensing** tools enhance the ability of coastal-resource managers to keep pace with increasing population-pressure on coastal resources and improve climate change adaptation strategies. Remote sensing techniques allow assessments that are impossible to do with traditional methods.
- **Development of innovative Decision Support Tools (DSTs):** It is recommended that the MSP initiative contributes to the development of new Decision Support Tools (DSTs) including socio-economical components, making them amenable for transfer to competent authorities of the different countries, for their use. DSTs are aimed to facilitate interaction and decision-making with the stakeholders, policy makers and all the actors and citizens of the area using *inter alia* foresight scenarios at the relevant regional/international scale. DST will allow decision-makers to evaluate different scenarios and provide for a better-informed decision-making by considering the broader impacts and interdependencies among different sea-uses. Research on governance issues between the different regions and countries to implement a joint MSP will be welcomed and shared with the different actors. Advanced models for integrating multiple disciplines to create DST considering environmental processes, anthropogenic activities, socio-economic and socio-ecological aspects. Development of DST demonstrators will be welcome to show the concrete added value of DSTs for specific sector and to overcome technical and non-technical barriers in co-using advanced DSTs in institutional MSP processes.

## **2.2.4 Blue Bioresources**

The EU Green Deal sets is driving Europe’s blue economy to become sustainable and climate-neutral by 2050. The Blue Bioresources represent an important component of the broader blue economy, delivering food, feed and bio-based products for Europe and export markets. To achieve sustainability, it is important to consider all stages of the bioresources value chain, from production (fisheries, aquaculture) to seafood processing, including, biotechnology products, extracting value from waste streams and developing new types of biomasses, new food and non-food products, new products enabling innovative processes. Multi/trans-disciplinary approaches will be requested to address complex challenges, including social sciences and humanities and

cooperation with the industry and relevant stakeholder, including citizen and consumers behaviour.

The Blue Bioresources component targets sustainable management of ocean resources to produce environmentally sustainable, high-quality, resilient, and climate-neutral seafood and feed and innovative marine bio-based products. It will be focused on a just transition to the sustainable production and utilisation of blue bioresources, with emphasis on production and processes that minimise the environmental impacts including carbon emission while meeting the demand for healthy and affordable blue food, feed, and other bio-based products.

- *The reduction of bycatch, discards, and processing waste for fisheries and aquaculture products and how value can be created from unavoidable biomass side streams, in order to increase the efficiency and circularity of aquaculture and fisheries, including valorization of side stream materials for instance by using biotechnology methods.*
- *The exploration of the potential of low trophic species in fisheries and aquaculture - such as algae, shellfish, molluscs etc - for blue food and feed purposes;*
- *Increase the supply of blue food by utilising a larger proportion of fish catches for human consumption and by utilising new sustainable marine resources, such as algae.*

**The following targeted research questions, to be explored in the project formulation, are presented hereafter. A project needs, at a minimum, to address one or more of the following points, including a multi-actor approach:**

- ***Sustainable Fisheries and Harvesting***

Overexploitation and the cumulative impact of overfishing with climate change and other drivers on susceptible species and ecosystems is leading to unsustainable scenarios for the next decades. To bring Europe's fish stocks back to sustainable levels, there are important challenges remaining such as improvement of management of overfished stocks, optimised fishing technologies and practices to reduce bycatch and discards, and increased fishing of underutilised species. A forward-looking ecosystem-based management (EBM) approach have to reduce adverse impacts of fishing and harvesting on marine ecosystems, particularly sensitive species, and on vulnerable habitats. New digital tools, ecosystem modelling, and artificial intelligence tools can optimise both small- and large-scale fishing operations with the development of sustainable management practices. Assessments and solution scenarios should consider the impact and social implications

of combined drivers such as habitat degradation, warming, water stratification and acidification, as well as their effects, such as changes in ecosystem composition and modification of spatial migration.

Activities should take into consideration projects funded under the Mission to Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030 and could address the following aspects:

*All possible innovative approaches to avoid or drastically reduce bycatch and discards can be considered. It will include integrated components of innovation for fishing vessels, fishing gears, vessel operations and fishing practices to avoid catching undersized and non-commercial or protected species. Innovative ways to address selective fishing, for example based on light, smell or all the ways to attract the targeted species, based on its feeding practice or hunting behaviour.*

- *Projects could address the development of innovative fishing gears and fisheries technologies, addressing the 2 challenges: reduction of the fisheries’ carbon footprint (fuel consumption) and reduction of fishing impacts on the marine biodiversity and habitat destruction. Exploring and co-developing with industry the potential of these new fishing techniques on new resources with a focus on small-scale fisheries, and on seaweed harvesting;*
- *Development of more selective fishing gears that reduce environmental impact, particularly in the bottom-contact fisheries. Particular attention will be brought on small scale fisheries to remain efficient and developing its competitiveness;*
- *Development on knowledge of recreational fisheries to manage their impact on fish and shellfish biomasses;*
- *Research on migratory fish stocks that spend different parts of their life cycle in different jurisdictions. This is a critical issue for the EU Common Fisheries Policy and co-management of stocks between EU and third countries;*

*Harvesting of a wide range of low trophic marine species may provide an opportunity for increased sustainable valorisation and production of Blue Food and feed, including valorisation of side streams materials for instance by using biotechnology methods. Sustainability of the possible targeted harvesting has to be demonstrated as environmental sustainability and reduction of carbon footprints. The example of the mesopelagic ecosystem can be addressed taking into consideration the outcomes of relevant Horizon 2020 projects e.g., SUMMER and MEESO.*

*Development of recycling with innovative new products and technologies with low energy consumption allows to increase sustainable supply of food production. They will include utilisation of side streams and residues from fish processing industries as well as unwanted wastes by catch and discards, the use of low-value fish species for healthy and sustainable food and algae for innovative use for food and feed for human consumption, pets or farmed animals or for production of high-value products;*

- *Understanding the social and economic drivers of change in commercial fisheries to inform both fisheries, economic and regional development policy and planning. Include the fisheries policy in alignment with other policy domains (MSP, MSFD, WFD) and the implications of measures associated with the EU Nature Restoration Law on fishing and fishers.*

- **Sustainability in aquaculture**

Production of safe, secure food and sustainable aquaculture, has a margin for improvement in respect to diversification, competitiveness, environmental performance including invasive species and carbon-neutral production. Aquaculture production should take care of the growing consumer demand for blue organic food, and the need for innovative blue bio-based products, while the responsibilities of aquaculture production face new challenges on the social, economic, and environmental sustainability and carbon neutrality of the production.

This requires targeted technological advancements and diversification of the production with new species, in particular the production of organisms of the primary and/or low trophic levels, like plankton, algae, and shellfish. Economical components and consumer behaviour will be large critical elements conditionals to the success of the new aquaculture products. Integrated multitrophic aquaculture (IMTA), off-shore production, closed systems, or land-based infrastructure with use of recirculating aquaculture systems (RAS), are options for culturing of established and new species if they have achieved to reduce their energy consumption and if they are coupled to green energy.

The development of multi-uses offshore platforms will give opportunities for massive aquaculture development. Solutions for recycling discards and wastes, and technology improvement with digital and IA development will favour a new mechanisation system for production and processing after harvest. The latest and modified technological and digital systems should favour and

promote the farmed products' health, welfare, and quality farmed products' health, welfare, and quality.

Activities should take into consideration projects funded under the Mission to ‘Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030’ and could cover the following aspects:

- *Challenges and opportunities associated with further development and expansion of seaweed and shellfish production, spread of invasive species, risk of genetic pollution, food safety challenges due to possible bioaccumulation of heavy metals; algae diseases and new methods for processing harvested seaweed; Development of biologically, technically, and economically feasible onshore recirculating aquaculture systems opportunities for fish, shellfish, and seaweed with development of biorefinery to optimise recirculation issues; challenges and opportunities associated with mollusc production, including but not limited to harmful algal blooms as potential threats for food safety; cost/benefits to move offshore for longer distance. Estimation of the costs, the risks and social acceptance of this migration;*
- *Challenges and opportunities for growth in fed mariculture, including to sustainable organic and healthy feed, fish health optimization environmental concerns, and food safety issues due to bioaccumulation and biomagnification of xenobiotics in parallel with a low environmental footprint including a decrease of fuel energy consumption;*
- *Research projects need to be developed by, or in close cooperation with the private sector. A focus on the refinement or the development of new innovative solutions of production processes in sustainable and integrated aquaculture while increasing food quality, carbon neutrality and potential development in relation with long term forecasting of climate change;*
- *Methods to ensure traceability of aquaculture products along the whole chain to answer to the consumer request on the origin, contamination of hazardous substances on the healthy products with analysis of the life cycle of the processes to reduce carbon footprint in aquaculture.*

- **Blue Biotechnology:**

Utilisation of the whole diversity of aquatic organisms for production of a variety of new bio-based products: food, feed, chemical, medical with recycling from wastes or side streams (by-catch, rest raw materials etc.), and extraction of new products from marine life including seaweed and

plankton. High-value molecules or products can be developed through different innovative processes such as biorefinery approach which is also contributing to minimise waste by maximising the use of the different components of the bioresource and enhancing the value chain. Exploration of the synergies between blue (aquatic farming) and green (agriculture) in a fully circular blue bioeconomy.

Activities should address the following aspects:

- *Development of new sustainable bio-based molecules or products for food, feed, chemical, pharmaceutical, medical, cosmetics and material,*
- *Post-harvest or processing technology for good conservation of marine products to avoid any degradation to increase the quality of innovative products.*
- *Use of digitalisation to support of traceability of bio-based products from marine sources.*
- *Socio-economic effects of the proposed innovations and their social acceptance by the actors from aquaculture and fisheries and also by the citizens consumers including request of the evolution of policy to support reform with respect to regulations on the use of waste and discards.*

Synergies and complementarity of the projects are requested with EU partnerships such as: FutureFoodS which will focus on the post-farming and fishing part of food systems, and Animal Health and Welfare. Coordination with the projects under the Mission ‘Restore our Oceans and Waters’ (Mission Ocean); the Circular Bio-based Europe Joint Undertaking (CBE-JU) and Waterborne platform will be organized by SBEP portfolios.

## 2.3 Impact of the proposals

With Horizon Europe, the EU Members-States and Associated Countries, want to generate impact-driven R&I projects and to create significant societal and environmental impacts, contributing also to the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030), whose implementation is coordinated by IOC/UNESCO. In line with this perspective, it is requested to include a plan that describes what impact the research is expected to achieve in the long run and how it contributes to the overall impacts defined for the call:

- *the potential for impact beyond the academic world, such as in societal, technical, environmental, economic, policy-making, or behavioural realms;*



- *how relevant stakeholders can be involved in, and/or benefit from, the design and achievement of the research project;*
- *to what extent the project addresses the uptake of research findings into decision-making processes and policy-making;*
- *how approaches for achieving impact are integrated into the research design and conducted by the consortium.*

One way to make such a plan is to establish a methodology of Theory of Change (ToC) with a related Impact Pathway (IP) to describe the research process, mentioning well-specified outputs and outcomes. Please refer to the Annex A: Theory of change, for more information on how to set up a Theory of Change, as well as to a workshop from the Dutch Research Council (NWO), which is freely accessible: <https://impact.nwo.nl/en/working-with-an-impact-plan>.

The integration of the above elements will be considered in the evaluation of the proposals. In particular, it will be considered whether the proposal ensures that the project consortium, in its composition, sufficiently reflects the project’s stated aims in relation to output, outcome and impact creation, *i.e.*, that its initial Theory of Change is realistic and achievable by the consortium partners.

## 3.0 FUNDING

### 3.1 Participating countries

A total of 38 PFOs from 26 countries (20 Member-States, 5 Associated Countries and 1 Third Country) have agreed to launch the second Joint Call for R&I proposals. The list of countries is as follows: Belgium, Brazil, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Faroe Islands, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, The Netherlands, Tunisia, and Türkiye.

Table 1: Provisional funding commitment for the second call

Country	PFOs Acronym	Funded Priority areas				Indicative budget in euro (provisional)
		Digital Twins of the Oceans at regional sub basin scale	Blue economy sectors, development of marine multi-use infrastructures	Planning and managing sea-uses at the regional level	Blue Bioresources	
Belgium	BELSPO	x	x	x		500 000
Belgium	F.R.S. - FNRS	x	x	x	x	300 000
Belgium	FIO/VLAIO	x	x	x	x	1 000 000
Belgium	FWO	x	x	x	x	700 000
Brazil <sup>17</sup>	CONFAP	x	x	x	x	1 250 000 (TBC)
Cyprus	RIF	x	x	x	x	1 300 000
Denmark	IFD	x	x	x	x	1 300 000
Estonia	ETAG	x	x	x	x	300 000
Estonia	KLIM	x	x			100 000
Estonia	REM		x		x	100 000
Faroe Islands	RCFI	x	x	x	x	135 000
Finland	AKA	x		x		850 000
France	ANR	x	x	x	x	2 000 000
Germany	BMBF/ PtJ	x	x	x		1 500 000
Greece	GSRI	x	x	x	x	1 000 000
Iceland	RANNIS	x	x		x	600 000
Ireland	MI	x	x	x	x	1 000 000
Italy	RER	x		x	x	300 000
Italy	MUR	x	x	x	x	3 500 000
Latvia	LCS	x	x	x	x	600 000
Lithuania	LMT	x	x	x	x	420 000
Malta	MCST	x	x	x	x	500 000
Norway	RCN	x		x	x	3 000 000
Poland	NCBR	x	x	x	x	1 000 000
Portugal	CCDRC	x	x	x	x	400 000
Portugal	FCT	x	x	x	x	500 000
Portugal	FRCT	x		x	x	100 000
Romania	MCID	x	x	x	x	1 000 000
Slovenia	MVZI	x	x	x	x	900 000
Spain	AEI	x	x	x	x	1 200 000
Spain	CDTI	x	x		x	400 000
Sweden	FORMAS	x	x	x	x	2 000 000
Sweden	SNSA	x				1 450 000

<sup>17</sup> Please consult the Annexe B to check- the brazilian agencies funding the call and their budget.

The Netherlands	LNV, IenW, NWO	x	x	x	x	2 000 000
Tunisia	MHESR	x	x	x	x	400 000
Türkiye	TÜBİTAK	x	x	x	x	400 000

## 3.2 Financial commitment

A total of approx. 43 million EUR have been provisionally allocated for this Joint Transnational Call by the participating PFOs combined with the contribution from the European Union (EU) (Table 1). These funds will be used for R&I activities carried out by researchers, institutions, and companies according to the funding rules and legal frameworks of their respective PFOs (Annex B).

Partners applying in a consortium cannot request more than the maximum amount stated by the PFO from which they seek funding in Annex B of the national/regional regulations to this Call Announcement.

## 3.3 Funding decision

The choice of transnational projects to be funded will then be taken by the Call Steering Committee (CSC) strictly following the ranking list established by the International Evaluation Committee (IEC) and by budgetary considerations. Final funding decisions are made by the PFOs.

# 4.0 PROCEDURES, ELIGIBILITY, AND SELECTION CRITERIA

## 4.1 Call process

The Joint Call will be advertised online from the following web pages:

- Online Submission Tool: <https://proposals.etag.ee/sustainable-blue>
- Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership Website:  
<https://www.bluepartnership.eu/funding-opportunities>
- PFOs web pages and on the EC Funding & Tenders portal.

The application process consists of two consecutive steps:

### STEP 1

The Consortium Coordinator must submit a pre-proposal on behalf of the consortium, providing key data on the proposed project. The deadline for the submission of the pre-proposal is 10/04/2024, 15.00 CET (Brussels time). Submission of pre-proposals is mandatory; it is not possible to enter the procedure at a later stage.

### STEP 2

The Consortium Coordinator must submit a full proposal (upon invitation) on behalf of the consortium. The deadline for full proposal submission is 06/11/2024, 15.00 CET (Brussels time). Deadline to be confirmed after Step 1.

## 4.2 Call timetable

Table 2: Second call timetable

17 <sup>th</sup> January 2024	Pre-announcement
<b>1<sup>st</sup> February 2024</b>	<b>Official launch – Call Publication</b>
<b>10<sup>th</sup> April 2024, 15.00 CET</b>	<b>Deadline for submission (pre-proposals)</b>

11 <sup>th</sup> April to early May 2024	First eligibility checks by Joint Call Secretariat and National Contact Points (NCPs)
Mid-July 2024	Results of the pre-proposal evaluation Invitation to submit full proposals
Mid to end-July 2024	Period for appeal (redress procedure)
Early to mid-August 2024	Evaluation of the appeals and communication of decisions to the applicants
<b>6<sup>th</sup> November 2024, 15:00 CET</b>	<b>Submission of the Full Proposals</b>
7 <sup>th</sup> November to end-November 2024	Second eligibility check by Joint Call Secretariat and NCPs
End-February 2025	Results of the full proposal evaluation (ranked list of proposals)
Early-March 2025	Projects recommended for funding by the Call Steering Committee (CSC) Announcement of results to applicants
Early to mid-March 2025	Period for appeal (redress procedure)
Mid-March 2025 to early- April 2025	Evaluation of the appeals and communication of decisions to the applicants
1 <sup>st</sup> May to 31 <sup>th</sup> August 2025	Start of funded projects
30 <sup>th</sup> April to 30 <sup>th</sup> August 2028	End of funded projects

### 4.3 Confidentiality and conflict of interests

The SBEP PFOs are committed to avoiding any Conflict of Interest and safeguarding good scientific practice. A Code of Conduct related to Conflict of Interests, confidentiality and non-disclosure is defined and applies to the CSC, Independent Observer and IEC. An important aspect of this code is the avoidance of any conflicts between personal interests and the interests of the applicants. The CSC and related National Contact Points (NCPs), the independent observer, and the IEC will perform their work impartially and take all measures to prevent any situation where the impartial

and objective implementation of the work is compromised for reasons involving economic interest, political or national affinity, family or emotional ties or any other shared interest (‘conflict of interests’).

The following situations will automatically be considered as a conflict of interest:

- Being involved in (the preparation of) any pre- and/or full proposal;
- Having submitted a proposal as a principal investigator or a team member, under the call;
- Being director, trustee or partner or in any way involved in the management of an applicant;
- Being employed or contracted by one of the applicants;
- Having close professional proximity, *e.g.*, being a member of the same scientific institution with a hierarchical or department relation or impending change of the IEC member to the institution of the applicant in a position with a hierarchical or department relation or vice versa;
- Having close family ties (spouse, domestic or non-domestic partner, child, sibling, parent etc.) or other close personal relationships with the applicants of the proposal;
- Having (or have had during the last five years) a close scientific collaboration with an applicant of the proposal;
- Having (or have had) a relationship of scientific rivalry or professional hostility with an applicant of the proposal;
- Having (or have had), a mentor/mentee relationship with a principal investigator of the proposal;
- Having a current or prior (past 5 years) activity in advisory bodies of the applicant’s institution, *e.g.*, scientific advisory boards;
- Having direct or indirect benefit if any proposal submitted is accepted or rejected;
- Having personal economic interests in the funding decision. Other situations preventing the IEC members or reviewers from participating in the evaluation impartially could be considered a conflict of interest and should be reported as such by the IEC members.

Applicants included in a (pre-)proposal submitted to this call (including all the team members) may not serve as IEC members.

At the implementation level, the Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership Consortium partners that might apply to the co-funded calls are completely excluded from the work of call preparation, selection and project follow-up and monitoring. All related information is kept non-accessible to these Consortium members. In that way, the possibility for research units belonging to these organisations to participate in the Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership calls for proposals is safeguarded. To ensure complete transparency and inform the recipients of calls, the Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership Consortium partners that may apply to the co-funded calls are explicitly listed in Annex C, emphasizing their absolute extraneousness to the process of preparing the calls both in terms of defining the priority areas of the call and the procedures for evaluating and selecting project proposals. Concrete measures to avoid potential Conflicts of Interest or unequal treatment of applicants are ensured.

## 4.4 Publishable information

A list of the funded projects will be published at the end of the call process (once the projects have been selected) on the Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership Website and on the Ocean Decade website and the Ocean Decade Network. Therefore, applicants should be aware that the following information from the proposals may be published by the SBEP, IOC/UNESCO and the PFO for promotional purposes: (1) Project Title and Project Acronym, (2) Publishable abstract, (3) Duration of the project, (4) Total costs and total funding of the research project, (5) Organisation name and country of each partner, (6) Name of the Project Coordinator.

Each of the funding organisations will subsequently handle projects approved for funding. Projects approved for funding will be governed by the confidentiality rules in the national law of the funding organisations.

## 4.5 Privacy policy

By applying, the Consortium Coordinator and partners agree to the use, share (for specific purposes: *e.g.*, evaluation, for the future nomination of experts, Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership-specific communication) and the storage of projects-related information according

to the Privacy Policy and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The Online Submission Tool presents further information on the Privacy Policy (<https://proposals.etag.ee/sustainable-blue>).

## 4.6 Eligibility criteria

When applying to this call, the applicants must be aware that their (pre-) proposals must meet both (i) general eligibility criteria, summarized in Table 2, and (ii) national/regional eligibility criteria (Annex B).

A (pre-)proposal that does not fulfil all the general eligibility criteria will be declined without any further review.

Each partner involved in the project will be funded by its national/regional funding organisations. The consortium must therefore also comply with all the relevant national/regional eligibility rules (Annex B). It is particularly important to note that some funding organisations may require the submission of national documents in addition to the international (pre-)proposal. Besides, national/regional funding bodies may not fund all types of organisations.

Please note:

- If the partner acting as the consortium coordinator is not eligible, the whole proposal will be considered ineligible and will not be evaluated;
- If any other partner (not applicable to the coordinator) is declared ineligible:
  - *The ineligible partner could participate in the consortium as a self-funded partner;*
  - *The other partners could engage themselves to cover the tasks of the ineligible partner;*
  - *The ineligible partner could be replaced by another partner that will request funds from a PFO with an undersubscription ratio. The list of the PFOs with an undersubscription ratio will be provided to coordinators invited to submit a full proposal at the end of the first step selection process.*
  - *The ineligible partner cannot be replaced by a self-funded partner.*

At Step 2, if the consortium coordinator and/or any other partner is declared ineligible for funding by a PFO, the whole proposal will be considered ineligible and will not be evaluated.



Any change in the consortium composition must conform to the general eligibility criteria defined in 4.6.1 and be validated by the relevant funding organisations.

Before applying, every partner should verify their corresponding national/regional regulations and check their eligibility with their National Contact Points (NCPs). The Consortium Coordinator should verify that all partners of the consortium verified their eligibility. NCPs will provide support about national/regional rules and requirements (Annex B).

(Pre-)proposals that fulfil all requirements *i.e.*, general eligibility criteria and all relevant national/regional eligibility criteria, will enter the evaluation process described in 4.8. The JCS on behalf of the CSC, will communicate the results of the eligibility check and the decisions taken to the coordinator of each consortium.

#### **The case of beneficiaries of Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership’ participating in R&I call for proposals:**

Research teams of some beneficiaries of the Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership may participate in this co-funded call; the list of the beneficiaries of the SBEP allowed to participate in the projects’ consortia is indicated in Annex C. For those beneficiaries, firewall measures have been foreseen to mitigate the risk of, perception of, or de facto conflict of interest or unequal treatment of applicants, including clear segregation of duties. All other beneficiaries of the Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership may not apply for funding under the co-funded call for proposals.

### **4.6.1 General eligibility criteria**

The general eligibility criteria are described in Table 3. (Pre-)proposals that do not meet all these criteria will be considered ineligible and thus will not be considered for funding.

Table 3: General eligibility criteria

Scope	(Pre-)proposals must address one main priority area.  It is not compulsory to address all sub-themes within the priority area.
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<p>Consortium composition</p>	<p>Each consortium must be composed of eligible partners from at least three different countries participating in the call and requesting financial support from at least three different PFO participating in this call.</p> <p>In addition to the abovementioned condition, the projects must involve at least two independent legal entities from two different EU Member States or Horizon Europe Associated Countries<sup>18</sup> eligible for EU funding for this call for (pre-)proposal (*as recipients of the financial support, at the time of the closing of the call by 10<sup>th</sup> April 2024).</p> <p><b>Specific requirements regarding self-funded partners, i.e. partners that do not require funding:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <i>Self-funded partners must demonstrate the willingness to self-fund their activities or show evidence that other partners are willing to fund their activities;</i></li> <li>– <i>A letter of intent/commitment must be submitted with the full proposal at Step 2;</i></li> <li>– <i>A self-funded partner cannot act as the consortium coordinator;</i></li> <li>– <i>Self-funded partners are not counted for the minimum requirement of eligible partners and countries.</i></li> </ul>
<p>Consortium coordinator</p>	<p>In each (pre-)proposal, one entity must act as the consortium coordinator;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <i>The consortium coordinator must be eligible for funding by a funding organisation of this call;</i></li> <li>– <i>The consortium coordinator has the responsibility for submitting the (pre-)proposal;</i></li> <li>– <i>The principal investigator (PI) of the entity acting as consortium coordinator must be employed by an eligible organisation in one of the countries participating in the call according to the terms and conditions of</i></li> </ul>

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<sup>18</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/common/guidance/list-3rd-country-participation\\_horizon-auratom\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/common/guidance/list-3rd-country-participation_horizon-auratom_en.pdf)

	<p><i>the participating funding organisation from which he/she applies for support;</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <i>A person can act as consortium coordinator only in one proposal.</i></li> </ul>
Requested funding	Partners from the same country cannot request more than 60% of the total funding requested by a proposal.
Duration	<p>The projects must be 36 months;</p> <p>The start date and end date of the researcher groups within the consortium must be aligned as far as possible.</p>
(Pre-) proposals submission	<p>A two-step process will apply, with a mandatory submission of pre-proposals at the Step 1 and submission of full proposals upon invitation to Step 2.</p> <p>(Pre-) proposals must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <i>be written in English</i></li> <li>– <i>be submitted electronically with the Electronic Proposal Submission System (EPSS) before the set deadlines at <a href="https://proposals.etag.ee/sustainable-blue">https://proposals.etag.ee/sustainable-blue</a></i></li> <li>– <i>Instructions for electronic submission will be available on the Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership website at <a href="https://www.bluepartnership.eu/funding-opportunities">https://www.bluepartnership.eu/funding-opportunities</a> in February 2024.</i></li> <li>– <i>be complete, respect page limits and the number/type of attachments allowed, including CV templates that are in line with sound principles for research assessment according to the (pre-)proposals forms (Annexes D and E) and information provided in the EPSS.</i></li> </ul>

#### 4.6.2 National/Regional Eligibility Criteria

In addition to the general eligibility criteria, each project partner must ensure that its contribution to the overall project conforms to:

- *Where applicable, the relevance of the (pre-)proposal to the priority areas funded by national/regional PFOs;*

- *Compliance with national/regional funding eligibility criteria and regulations as reported in the Annex B. The table in Annex B describes important restrictions related to each national/regional regulation;*
- *Compliance with limits to budget requests;*
- *Where requested by the national funding organisation, submission of additional national documents by national rules.*

### 4.6.3 Recommendations for the applicants

All partners within a consortium should take into consideration the following recommendations for setting up their project (pre-)proposals:

#### Scope

- *(Pre-)proposals should go beyond the state of the art by providing high-quality R&I and, when appropriate, make use of innovative technologies, approaches, and concepts to do so;*
- *(Pre-) proposals should be scientifically excellent and relevant to policies framed under Blue Economy and consider ongoing research activities funded by other EU Missions, instruments, programmes, or projects. Cooperation with these activities is of high importance to avoid redundancy, favour complementarity and increase synergies;*
- *(Pre-)proposals should contribute to cross-cutting themes such as the open data policy, development of capacity-building activities and ocean literacy activities, promote the inclusion of young people in the activities and knowledge transfer, follow partnership communication guidelines using a common visual identity, to promote equal opportunities for participation of women and men in the research consortia and comply with EC ethics self-assessment principles;*
- *(Pre-) proposals are strongly encouraged to cover a broad geographic scale . Projects are expected to cover at least two EU sea basins and assess the impact of the projects on several EU sea basins.*

*Consortium composition:*

- *All (pre-)proposals are encouraged to consider geographical balance and implementation in appropriate geographic settings and according to the objectives of the proposal, including in low- and middle-income countries/regions, and underperforming countries;*
- *Self-funded participation of legal entities from countries (and/or regions) participating in the call, is welcome;*
- *Project partners that are not eligible for funding may participate as self-funded if they have their separate source of funding;*
- *It is strongly encouraged to involve stakeholders from the quadruple-helix (i.e., small, and medium enterprises (SMEs), industries, authorities, public administrations, associations, as well as civil society organisations) as partners or self-funded partners. The modalities of participation of stakeholders are defined in the national/regional eligibility criteria. Stakeholder engagement in the research projects will enhance innovation, policy, and societal relevance and ultimately the impact of the projects;*
- *All proposals should integrate the gender dimension<sup>19</sup> of R&I activities;*
- *Every partner in a (pre-)proposal, including a self-funded partner, needs a Participant Identification Code (PIC) from the EC to be included in the submission. The applicants must check their PIC or ask for the creation of a PIC well in advance of the submission<sup>20</sup>. The same request applies to subcontractors.*

*Budget:*

- *There is no specific limit to the total budget for proposals;*

<sup>19</sup> [https://erc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document/file/GEPs\\_in\\_HE\\_guidelines.pdf](https://erc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document/file/GEPs_in_HE_guidelines.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> 9-digit number serving as a unique identifier for organisations (legal entities) participating in EU funding programmes/procurements. If needed, one can apply for a temporary PIC at: <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/how-to-participate/participant-register>. A search tool for organisations and their PICs is available at <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/how-to-participate/participant-register-search>. We suggest validating the PICs via the public available Partner Search – Organisation Profile service. This allows to fill out some requested data inputs automatically, which is less error-prone and provides a much better user experience. <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/support/apis>

- *The requested total budget of proposals is only limited by the number of eligible partners and by the budget of each partner. Please consider the national regulations of each research funding organisation about the specific budget limitations and the general eligibility criteria, the section on Requesting Funding.*

*Data management:*

Please note that you will be requested to produce data management plans (DMP) and regularly update them during the project. The guide in Annex F “Open access and FAIR data” presents the core requirements for the establishment of a DMP and the expectations at the step of (pre-)proposals and awarded projects.

#### **4.6.4 Ethical issues**

The evaluation criteria of this call for (pre-)proposals include the evaluation of compliance with relevant ethical requirements. **Applicants should always describe any relevant ethical aspects in their research plans.** If a research permit or a statement by an ethics committee is required for the implementation of the project, applicants should provide information on the permits or permit proposals.

Researchers are required to adhere to the principles of good scientific practice and to follow the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity by ALLEA<sup>21</sup> (All European Academies) and the Global Code of Conduct for Research in Resource-Poor Settings<sup>22</sup>. **Projects must comply with the "Do no significant harm principle"**<sup>23</sup>.

Any proposal which seems to contravene fundamental ethical principles will not be selected and may be excluded from the selection procedure by the IEC. Judgment of the significance of ethical

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<sup>21</sup> <https://allea.org/code-of-conduct/>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.globalcodeofconduct.org/>

<sup>23</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/support/fag/15485>

issues will be made by using the criteria published by the European Commission in its guidelines on ‘How to Complete your Ethics Self-Assessment’<sup>24</sup>.

## 4.7 Submission procedure

A two-step procedure will apply to this Joint Transnational Call; at Step1 the submission of pre-proposals is mandatory, and at Step 2, applicants must submit full proposals upon invitation.

(Pre-)proposals must be submitted electronically using the Electronic Proposal Submission System (EPSS): <https://proposals.etag.ee/sustainable-blue>.

Instructions for electronic submission will be available on the Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership website at <https://www.bluepartnership.eu/funding-opportunities>, in February 2024.

For any technical questions regarding the submission procedure using the EPSS, please contact the SBEP EPSS technical helpdesk: [epss.sbep@g.etag.ee](mailto:epss.sbep@g.etag.ee).

Please note that:

- *The online system may experience high traffic volumes in the last hours before the submission deadline and it is therefore highly recommended to submit the final version of the pre/full proposal well in advance of the deadline to avoid any last-minute technical problems;*
- *The submission system will close at 15:00 CET of the deadline date set for both Step 1 and Step 2. Please note that the JCS can only ensure responses to email support requests up to noon CET;*
- *Requests for extensions of the deadline due to last-minute technical problems will not be considered. Any proposals not correctly submitted at this moment will be declared ineligible;*

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<sup>24</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/common/guidance/how-to-complete-your-ethics-self-assessment\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/common/guidance/how-to-complete-your-ethics-self-assessment_en.pdf)

- *All complete proposals will be submitted automatically when the platform closes, to avoid a situation where an applicant does not have time to click on the submit button. In this situation, the proposal will be evaluated as it stands;*
- *Some partners of the consortia may also be required to submit an application to their respective national/regional funding organisations. Please consult the national/regional regulations (Annex B) and contact the designated NCPs, for further information about the procedures to follow.*

#### **4.7.1 Step 1: submission of a Pre-Proposal (mandatory step)**

Applicants must submit pre-proposals in Step 1 as it is not possible to enter the procedure at a later stage. Applicants must also submit any national documentation required by each participating funding organization according to national rules.

A pre-proposal eligibility check will be carried out both at the international level (by the JCS, based on the general eligibility rules) and at the national/regional level (by the NCPs) according to the funding organisations’ rules. The eligible pre-proposals will be sent to the scientific evaluation.

Submission on the EPSS:

- *The consortium coordinator (PI) creates an account on the EPSS (<https://proposals.etaq.ee/sustainable-blue>);*
- *The consortium coordinator can enter, edit, and save the electronic forms, add partners and self-funded partners to the consortium, upload the project description (5 pages), the required budget for each partner and submit the proposal. Partners can enter and edit their own data only. Each partner and self-funded partner must connect itself to the EPSS before the submission deadline, to validate its participation with the project consortium;*
- *All information must be written in English. The proposal is a self-contained document. Links and hyperlinks are not allowed;*
- *Information entered or uploaded on the platform can be updated until the submission deadline;*
- *It is very important to note that the information given in the pre-proposals is binding. It is not possible to change the content of the project between step 1 and step 2.*

If applicants have successfully passed the Step 1 (eligibility checks and evaluation), they will be invited to submit a full proposal at Step 2.



#### 4.7.2 Step 2: submission of a Full Proposal (only for invited applicants)

Only invited applicants can submit full proposals: information (in English) on the project consortia, **a 16-page description of the project** and the required budget for each partner must be submitted on the EPSS. All rules described in Step 1 also applies to Step 2.

Applicants should note the important following information:

- *Information on the core data (including Partners details, funding requested, PFO to which financial request is made, cannot be changed in full proposals, unless explicitly requested by evaluators, by a PFO or by the CSC. They, however, must comply with the general rules of the call and the rules of the relevant PFO. Any request for changes must be addressed by email to the JCS and the NCPs and will be reviewed by all PFOs involved in the proposal. The change(s) will have to be declared on the EPSS.*
- *In addition, as indicated in Step 1, the information given in the pre-proposals is binding. No major changes regarding the proposals’ content will be allowed by the CSC between the pre-proposals and full proposals; **Minor changes may be possible to improve your proposal if the objectives remain unchanged.** Applicants must explicitly indicate in their full proposal and into the EPSS the changes made as compared to the pre-proposals;*
- ***Minor changes to the budget** must be allowed by the relevant PFO; there is no need to inform the JCS. The change(s) will have to be declared on the EPSS.*
- *Regarding changes in the composition of the consortium i.e. changes (addition, removal or replacement) of Partners and Self-funded Partners (as institutions): **no change will be allowed, except in case of force majeure or if explicitly requested by the CSC** for the particular cases of i) ineligibility of a partner and/or ii) invitation to add a partner that will request funds to an undersubscribed PFO; the list of the undersubscribed PFO will be provided to coordinators invited to submit a full proposal at the end of the first step selection process.*
- *No change in the PI of the project Coordinator will be allowed, except in case of force majeure.*
- *In terms of process, the request for the change must be submitted to the JCS, at least one week before the deadline set for the submission of full proposals, it will be discussed on a case-by-case basis by the CSC. Any change in the composition of the consortium must*

*comply with the general eligibility rules of the call, and the national/regional regulations of the relevant PFOs. The eligibility of the new Partners must be verified with the relevant PFOs before submitting the proposal. The change(s) will have to be declared on the EPSS.*

Please indicate the acronym of your project when contacting the JCS and/or your NCP.

## **4.8 Evaluation of proposals**

A two-step evaluation procedure will apply at both Step 1 (for the pre-proposals evaluation) and Step 2 (for the full proposal evaluation).

### **4.8.1 The International Evaluation Committee (IEC)**

The CSC will establish an international evaluation committee (IEC). The composition of evaluation committees will consider the gender and geographical balance.

The IEC will comprise international scientific experts from the relevant research areas covered in this call including experts in ethics. The IEC composition should allow covering, as far as possible, the range of priority areas of the present call.

IEC members will have to sign a confidentiality, non-disclosure and conflict of interest policy and will have to declare all their potential conflicts of interest with submitted pre-proposals at Step 1 and with submitted full proposals at Step 2. The JCS will also check that no conflict of interest exists concerning the proposals evaluated.

IEC members cannot be applicants in the joint call and cannot evaluate proposals with which they declared a conflict of interest, to ensure a fair evaluation process and equal treatment of applicants. The IEC will be headed by a Chair and a Vice-Chair. The Chair and the Vice-Chair will be regular members of the IEC with the added duties of moderating the IEC meeting and conveying the results of the discussions to the CSC. The Chair and Vice-Chair of the IEC will be selected from a country not represented within the CSC to avoid as much as possible conflicts of interest. Members take part in the IEC as independent experts and do not represent any organisation, nor can they send any replacements. This means that their work on this Committee does not represent any organisation or nation. An independent observer is invited to the IEC meeting to assess the conformity of the general procedure with the EU regulation.

All eligible proposals will be subject to a scientific evaluation by IEC members, one of the IEC members will be nominated as a rapporteur. They must assess the proposal and prepare individual written evaluation reports, in advance of the IEC meeting. Details about the assessment criteria and scoring of proposals are detailed in 4.8.3.

During the IEC meeting, the evaluation results for each proposal will be presented by the evaluators. The IEC will discuss the proposals, agree on the final individual score for each criterion and the overall score for each proposal and establish the final ranking of proposals based exclusively on the set of criteria defined.

The decisions of the IEC should be taken collectively, preferably by consensus or by a simple majority of the panel members in case consensus cannot be reached. The IEC will produce a final Evaluation Summary Report for each proposal, which will be transmitted to the applicants (without scores).

## 4.8.2 Evaluation procedures

### *Step 1 (pre-proposals)*

#### *1. Eligibility checks*

Pre-proposals will be checked for eligibility at both the international level by the JCS (see criteria defined in 4.6.1) and at the national/regional level by the relevant funding organisations according to their national/regional criteria (see national/regional regulations; Annex B).

#### *2. Scientific Evaluation*

The eligible pre-proposals will be evaluated by a minimum of two independent evaluators of the IEC, and as far as possible, by three independent evaluators of the IEC who will be assigned by matching expert profiles with the need for pre-proposals evaluation. One of the IEC members will be nominated as a Rapporteur.

The evaluation of each pre-proposal will be based on the following criteria:

- Excellence (Threshold: 3/5)
- Impact (Threshold: 3/5)

During the IEC meeting, the evaluators will present the evaluation results of each pre-proposal. The IEC will discuss pre-proposals and agree on the final scores for each criterion.

The final score will be calculated by summing up the calculated average scores of the two criteria given by the IEC members for each criterion.

A ranking list of pre-proposals will be produced, including only pre-proposals that meet the minimum threshold, *i.e.*, 3 out of 5 in each criterion.

### 3. *Decision*

This Step 1 aims to identify the best proposals to proceed to step 2 and to ensure a balance between requested and available funds at the national level.

The ranked eligible pre-proposals will be sent to the CSC and be divided into 3 groups, according to their scores: Group A (highest evaluation scores), Group B (medium evaluation scores), and Group C (under the threshold scores). All pre-proposals in Group A will be invited to Step 2. Among the pre-proposals in Group B, proposals will be selected for step 2, considering the ranking list, the representativeness of all PFOs, and the funding ratio limits. Group C will be dismissed for their low ranking and unavailability of funding.

Consortium coordinators will be informed of the outcomes by the Joint call secretariat and, if appropriate, invited to submit a full proposal on the EPSS as well as any national documentation required by each PFO according to national rules.

## *Step 2 (full proposals)*

### *1. Eligibility checks*

After the submission deadline for full proposals, the submitted full proposals will be checked (by the JCS, and NCPs) to ensure that they meet the eligibility criteria. Full proposals not meeting the formal conditions will be rejected without further review.

### *2. Scientific evaluation*

All eligible full proposals will be subject to a scientific evaluation by at least three independent reviewers of the IEC who will be assigned by matching expert’s profiles with the need for full proposals evaluation. One of the IEC members will be nominated as a rapporteur.

The evaluation of each full proposal will be based on the following criteria:

- *Excellence (Threshold: 3/5)*
- *Impact (Threshold: 3/5)*
- *Quality and efficiency of implementation (Threshold: 3/5)*

During the IEC meeting, the evaluators will present the evaluation results of each proposal. The IEC will discuss full proposals and agree on the final scores for each criterion.

The final scores will be calculated by summing up the calculated average scores of the three criteria given by the IEC members for each criterion.

The threshold on the final score is 10/15: no project with a lower score will be funded.

The final ranking list will be produced based on the final scores, including only full proposals that meet the minimum threshold, *i.e.*, 3 out of 5 in each criterion, and threshold on the final score *i.e.*, 10 out of 15.

### 3. Decision

The final ranking list will be forwarded to the CSC, which will meet to decide on the projects to be recommended for funding by PFOs.

For this decision, the CSC will strictly follow the order of the ranking list from the IEC and the funding availability.

The projects with the same final scores will be prioritised by the CSC taking into consideration the following principles. The CSC can decide how to use these principles providing that they are used uniformly for all proposals:

- *Maximizing the total number of projects funded and thus optimizing the amount of EU financial support to the Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership call.*
- *Maximizing the number of countries/regions involved in the projects funded;*
- *Ensuring a balance between sea-basins involved in the projects funded;*
- *Assuring a good balance between different priority areas of the call;*
- *Promoting the allocation of the EU financial support pro rata, based on the actual contributions of the PFOs involved in the proposals.*

Official letters on evaluation results will be sent to Consortium coordinators.

### 4.8.3 Evaluation criteria and scoring system

The evaluation criteria (and sub-criteria) used by the IEC are summarised in the table below.

Table 4: Evaluation criteria

<p><b>Excellence (Step 1 and 2)</b></p> <p>Threshold: 3/5</p>	<p><b>Fit to the scope: clarity and pertinence of the project’s objectives to the call priority areas.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><i>Is there adequacy between the proposal’s objectives and research questions and the thematic priorities of the present call?</i></li></ul> <p><b>Novelty of research</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><i>The extent to which the proposed work is ambitious, and goes beyond the state of the art?</i></li><li><i>To what extent does the proposed activity suggest and explore creative, original concepts?</i></li><li><i>Is the proposal contributing to and/or increasing the advancement of its field and across different fields?</i></li><li><i>Does the proposal contribute to scientific excellence and significant progress toward the state of the art?</i></li><li><i>Does the proposal take scientific and/or technological risks?</i></li><li><i>Does the proposal have a potential breakthrough despite this risk-taking?</i></li></ul> <p><b>Addressing the knowledge gaps</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><i>Are the methodology and research design clear, feasible and suitable to answer the identified knowledge gaps and/or achieve the proposed objectives?</i></li><li><i>Are risks properly identified and managed?</i></li><li><i>The soundness of the proposed methodology, including the underlying concepts, models, assumptions, interdisciplinary approaches, appropriate consideration of the ethical issues according to the EU “Do no significant harm” principle (DNSH), gender dimension in research and innovation content, and the quality of open science practices, including sharing and management of research outputs and engagement of citizens, civil society and end users where appropriate.</i></li></ul>
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<p><b>Impact</b></p>	<p>The credibility of the pathways to achieve the expected outcomes and impacts specified in the call text, and the likely scale and significance of the contributions to the project.</p>
<p>(Step 1 and 2)</p>	
<p>Threshold 3/5</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Is the plan for impact clear and does it follow logically from the expected results of the project?</i></li> <li>• <i>Is it suitably ambitious with regard to solving the problem addressed?</i></li> <li>• <i>Is there a strategic impact on reinforcing competitiveness and/or on solving societal or environmental problems at the European and international levels?</i></li> </ul>
	<p>Suitability and quality of the measures to maximise expected outcomes and impacts, as set out in the dissemination and exploitation plan, including communication activities component of ocean literacy.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Are there feasible exploitation and dissemination plans of the scientific project results (including management and Intellectual Property Rights - IPR)</i></li> <li>• <i>Are the expected results or the knowledge acquired of importance for economic/ societal sectors and economic development?</i></li> <li>• <i>Is there a clear communication plan?</i></li> </ul>
	<p>The added value of European transnational cooperation and networking.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Does the proposal identify the right actors to make successful use of the results possible?</i></li> <li>• <i>Is there a clear plan for interactions with /exchange and transfer of results within the consortium, to stakeholders or civil society?</i></li> <li>• <i>Does the proposal present complementarities and synergies with the EU Missions of Horizon Europe and other European partnerships?</i></li> </ul>
	<p>The quadruple-helix ambition</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Are quadruple-helix stakeholder organisations part of the consortium?</i></li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Does the project plan include clear activities and an effort to liaise with the different stakeholders of the quadruple helix?</i></li> <li>• <i>Does the project plan foresee a clear impact on society and industry?</i></li> <li>• <i>Does the project successfully link science, politics, industry and society together?</i></li> </ul> <p>European Sea basins</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Did the project proposal cover at least 2 European basins?</i></li> <li>• <i>Does the project proposal have an impact on the various European basins?</i></li> </ul> <p>EU Taxonomy compliance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Does the project proposal comply with the following performance thresholds set by the EU Taxonomy?</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>Make a substantial contribution to at least one of six environmental objectives (1. Climate change mitigation, 2. Climate change adaptation, 3. The sustainable use and protection of water and marine resources, 4. The transition to a circular economy, 5. Pollution prevention and control and 6. The protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems);</i></li> <li>○ <i>Do no significant harm (DNSH) to the other five objectives, and;</i></li> <li>○ <i>Meet minimum social safeguards such as the OECD Guidelines on Multinational Enterprises and the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.</i></li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>Quality and efficiency of the implementation</b></p> <p>(Step 2 only)</p>	<p>Quality and effectiveness of the work plan, assessment of risks, appropriateness of the effort assigned to work packages, and the resources overall.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Is the proposed organisation and management of the scientific project effective and efficient?</i></li> </ul>

<p>Threshold 3/5</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Are the management structures and procedures, including risk and innovation management, appropriate?</i></li> <li>• <i>Are the resources assigned to the work packages in line with their objectives and deliverables?</i></li> </ul>
	<p>Capacity and role of each participant, and the extent to which the consortium brings together the necessary expertise.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Are participants in the proposal well-suited to the tasks assigned to them (necessary expertise)?</i></li> <li>• <i>Is their role well- defined and do they complement each other well?</i></li> <li>• <i>Is their role well- defined and do they complement each other well?</i></li> <li>• <i>Are tasks well balanced among partners?</i></li> </ul>
	<p>Appropriateness of the partners and justification of the resources to be committed (budget, staff, equipment ...)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Is the estimated effort/allocation of resources appropriate?</i></li> <li>• <i>Is it ensured that all participants have a valid role and adequate resources in the project to fulfil that role?</i></li> <li>• <i>Do the work and financial plans plus the schedule show prospects for success?</i></li> <li>• <i>Is there a balance of scientific and financial contributions from the respective countries' partners?</i></li> </ul>	

Individual scores will be attributed only to the three main criteria, even though the IEC experts will evaluate all sub-criteria described below in the scoring system.

Each criterion will be scored out of 5 (no half marks allowed) based on the following scoring system. The threshold for each criterion is 3 out of 5. Any project with a lower score for one of the criteria or an overall score lower than 10 at Step 2 will not be considered for funding.

Evaluators will identify strengths and weaknesses (if any) and provide context for their comments based on the application, *i.e.*, evaluators will be asked to score (pre-) proposals as they were submitted, rather than on their potential if certain changes were to be made. When an evaluator

identifies substantial shortcomings, he/she must reflect this by awarding a lower score for the criterion concerned. There should be consistency between the numerical scores and written comments.

Scoring system:

**0 – LIMITED** - The (pre-)proposal fails to address the criterion or cannot be assessed due to missing or incomplete information.

**1 – POOR** - The criterion is inadequately addressed, or there are serious inherent weaknesses.

**2 – FAIR** - The (pre-)proposal broadly addresses the criterion, but there are significant weaknesses.

**3 – GOOD** - The (pre-)proposal addresses the criterion well, but several shortcomings are present.

**4 – VERY GOOD** - The (pre-)proposal addresses the criterion very well, but a small number of shortcomings are present.

**5 – EXCELLENT** - The (pre-)proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. Any shortcomings are minor.

#### **4.8.4 Redress procedure**

Applicants can challenge the evaluation outcome if they suspect a breach in the application of the evaluation and selection procedures. This redress procedure only covers the procedural aspects of the evaluation and/or eligibility checks, including the national eligibility checks. The redress will not call into question the scientific or technical judgement of appropriately qualified experts.

In this case, they shall submit their request for redress to the JCS ([sbep.call-secretariat@agencerecherche.fr](mailto:sbep.call-secretariat@agencerecherche.fr)) via email, up to 14 calendar days after the date of dispatch of the evaluation outcome email by the JCS at the end of each step (first or second step). The (pre-)proposal outcome email containing the results of the evaluation will give information on the redress procedure, which is described below.

## **Admissibility of request for redress**

For a request for redress to be admissible the following conditions must be met:

- *The request for redress must be submitted by the coordinator of the (pre-)proposal to which the request for redress relates*
- *Only one request for redress per (pre-)proposal will be considered*
- *The request for redress must be addressed to the IEC Chair*
- *The request for redress must be submitted via email within the 14 calendar days deadline. – The request for redress must contain the following minimum information:*
  - *The name of the call for (pre-)proposals;*
  - *The (pre-)proposal number;*
  - *The acronym and the title of the (pre-)proposal;*
  - *A description of the alleged shortcomings of the evaluation procedure.*

The request for redress must demonstrate a procedural irregularity, factual error, manifest error of assessment, misuse of powers, or a conflict of interests. Requests for redress that do not meet the above conditions do not deal with the evaluation of a specific (pre-) proposal or express mere disagreement with the result or the reasoning of the evaluation might be judged as not suitable for redress.

## **Procedure**

Upon receipt of a request for redress, an acknowledgement of receipt will be sent by the JCS within 7 calendar days. The acknowledgement shall report the redress process and the anticipated date by which a decision on the request for redress will be communicated to the coordinator of the (pre-)proposal.

All requests for redress received by the 14 calendar days deadline will be processed together and the decision will be communicated to the coordinator of the (pre-)proposal within 14 calendar days from the deadline for submitting the requests for redress.

The IEC Chair will establish an internal redress committee chaired by the IEC Chair and comprised of the Independent Observer, and one representative of the consortium. The role of the redress committee is to evaluate the requests for redress according to the procedure, ensuring fair and equal treatment of applicants, with the support of the JCS (or the Chair of the CSC) and one

representative per research funding organisation concerned by the proposal requesting a redress procedure, if needed. The Committee will provide its opinion on the implementation of the evaluation procedure, based on the available information related to the proposal and its evaluation, and will make a recommendation to the IEC Chair, who is in charge of deciding, except for national eligibility.

A negative national eligibility check of a PFO cannot be overruled by the IEC Chair. Requests for redress on national eligibility decisions will be assessed by the PFO responsible for the national eligibility check, which will justify its decision to the Chair, to prove that national funding rules listed in the call text have been applied correctly.

**For Step 1:** Pre-proposals which were originally considered ineligible or not admissible to submit a full proposal, but which the IEC Chair found to be eligible will be allowed to participate in Step 2. This will not lead to a change in the deadline for the full proposal submission.

**For Step 2:** The redress procedure may lead to a re-evaluation of all or part of the proposal by independent experts not involved in the previous evaluation or to the confirmation of the initial evaluation.

A re-evaluation will only be carried out if the request for redress shows that the selection procedure was flawed by a breach which affects the evaluation outcome and the final decision on whether to fund a proposal. This means, for example, that a problem relating to one evaluation criterion will not lead to a re-evaluation if the proposal has failed anyway on another criterion or if even by adding the maximum points for this criterion, the final score remains below the funding threshold.

The score following any re-evaluation will be regarded as definitive. It may be lower than the original score. All requests for redress will be treated in confidence and will not prejudice future applications.

## 5.0 PROJECT'S IMPLEMENTATION

### 5.1 Contractual relationships

This SBEP call is a collaboration between funding organisations with the aim of establishing transnational research collaboration. The contracts with project partners are the responsibility of the national/regional PFOs.

Because of the fragmented nature of the funding, care will be taken to ensure that the individual contracts are synchronised both in time and content so that the project consortium can deliver transnational outputs as described in the project proposal. The national/regional PFOs must ensure that common SBEP conditions are met (*e.g.*, the common start date of a given project, reporting requirements, etc.).

For the whole duration of the contract, it is the responsibility of the Project Coordinator to inform the Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership consortium about any changes in the project, *i.e.*, modifications of the work plan, the project consortium, or the contract. The communication should be transmitted through the Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership Monitoring Group.

Any financial issue is under the responsibility of each national/regional PFO involved in the approved project.

## 5.2 Consortium Agreement

All project partners including self-funded partners are required to sign a Consortium Agreement (CA) before the official project starts or in any case no later than three months after the project starts. The CA should address matters on the management of project activities, finances, IPR and how to avoid and solve disputes which might be detrimental to the completion of the project. It will be the responsibility of the project coordinators to draw up a CA suitable for their own group.

Upon request, the CA must be made available to the national or regional PFOs, together with any other information required by national or regional regulations. Funding organisations might require the CA to release the funds. Support for the preparation of a consortium agreement can be found on the DESCA webpage <http://www.desca-2020-eu>.

## 5.3 Project monitoring and reporting

Funded projects will be required to submit via the Project Coordinator a mid-term report and a final report on research and activity progress (submission procedure will be specified at the kick-off of the projects). Some PFOs may request additional specific reports.

The funded projects must be completed within a maximum of three years and are part of an international research programme (SBEP) for which some joint activities will be organised, in particular:

- *a Kick-Off meeting, at the beginning of the funding period (approx. Autumn 2025), to explain objectives and expected results;*
- *a mid-term meeting (approx. Spring 2027) to present and discuss the mid-term reports, preliminary results, and future work;*
- *a final meeting (approx. Autumn 2028), to present and disseminate the project results and main outcomes.*

The coordinators of the funded projects are expected to actively engage in these three joint activities. Accordingly, the cost of attendance at the physical meetings should be foreseen in their proposals’ budget.

The objectives of these joint activities are the monitoring of the projects funded through the SBEP and the provision of networking and future collaboration opportunities. When possible, the meetings will be organised back-to-back with other relevant workshops/events.

Besides this, on behalf of the consortium, the Project Coordinator will be required to submit two written progress reports (mid-term and final). All consortium partners will have to deliver input for these reports. The Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership will provide a template for this task.

Funding recipients must ensure that all outcomes (publications, etc.) of transnational SBEP projects include a proper acknowledgement of the SBEP. All the publications resulting from funded projects must be published in adherence to the EC Open Science Policy (see Annex F).

## 5.4 Dissemination requirements

Dissemination of project outputs is obligatory and is the responsibility of the funded project partners. Detailed plans for dissemination of the results must be described in the proposals and are considered in the evaluation procedure. This can be organised in the form of various communication routes such as scientific papers, posters, course or training material, web-based tools, stakeholder involvement, workshops, or direct intervention towards end users. Dissemination to national end-users is necessary for all partner countries. A dissemination plan will be requested for the full proposal and should specify how the planned activities will contribute to the impact of the project.

Further, the project partners must acknowledge the transnational funding of the SBEP under Horizon Europe and the individual national/regional funding organisations in any document that is published (in written, oral, or electronic form) within the research project.



## 6.0 ANNEX A – THEORY OF CHANGE

## **7.0 ANNEX B – NATIONAL CONTACT POINTS AND NATIONAL/REGIONAL REGULATIONS**

## **8.0 ANNEX C – LIST OF BENEFICIARIES OF SBEP ALLOWED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE PROJECTS**

## 9.0 ANNEX D – PRE-PROPOSAL FORM

## 10.0 ANNEX E – FULL PROPOSAL FORM

## 11.0 ANNEX F – OPEN ACCESS AND FAIR DATA

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