Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership

THEMATIC PORTFOLIO

Innovations and digitalisation for low-impact sustainable small-scale fisheries management in EU sea-basins

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Final version – 12/6/2026

Lead: Thematic Portfolio Secretariat, ANR (French National Research Agency)

WP4 (Monitoring and follow-up of calls and projects), T4.6 (Portfolios of projects)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

This document is seen as a living document, which may be subject to changes throughout the Thematic Portfolio implementation. The changes are listed in the table below.

VERSION CONTROL		
Document version	Date	Changes
V0	5/5/2026	Initial draft
V1	12/6/2026	Changes made after collecting the first comments to the implementation plan. IOC UNESCO endorsement added to the dissemination activities.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. What is SBEP

The Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership (SBEP) is a Horizon co-funded partnership that brings together 74 partner institutions from 32 countries and the European Commission to pool research and innovation investments, and align national programmes at pan-European scale. More information about the Partnership can be found at: https://bluepartnership.eu/.

The core activity of SBEP is the launching of annual transnational joint calls co-funded by the partner institutions and the European Commission, based on the priorities outlined in the Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda (SRIA). The Intervention Areas are developed according to an annual cycle and drive future calls and activities.

The 2026 Intervention Areas are:

- Transitioning Blue Economy Sectors
- Managing Sea-Uses
- Blue Bioresources
- Resilient Coastal Communities and Businesses

A detailed description of the content of the Intervention Areas can be found here: 2026 Intervention Areas.

In addition, SBEP provides the platform to develop R&I clusters aimed to promote knowledge-sharing and R&I cooperation, both around thematic areas and at regional level.

2. The Thematic Portfolio Action

The Thematic Portfolio Action aims to connect ongoing research and innovation projects funded by the Partnership and by other national, regional or EU instruments for a two-year period, from early 2026 to early 2028. It is part of the activities of Work Package 4 (*Monitoring and follow up of calls and projects*), and more particularly of Task 4.6, '*Portfolios of projects*'.

Two Thematic Portfolios have been launched in parallel and fall under the scope of the Intervention Area 'Blue Bioresources' defined in the Partnership Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda:

- Thematic Portfolio 1: Innovations and digitalisation for low-impact sustainable small-scale fisheries management in EU sea-basins
- Thematic Portfolio 2: Innovations for boosting sustainability in marine algae cultivations and circularity in the blue bioeconomy

The primary goal of this action is networking. The ambition is to boost exchanges, knowledge and data sharing, and synergistic collaborations between R&I projects which address the same theme. Through a common platform provided by the Partnership, the Thematic Portfolios of projects are expected to improve communication across projects by enabling channels of networking and knowledge sharing, potentially facilitating the production of joint outputs and outcomes. Each portfolio will design its own roadmap comprising, for instance, joint actions to avoid duplication, competition, and overlap, to foster complementarities, to create exchanges of results, and to co-deliver impactful and innovative solutions for reaching a sustainable blue economy in the EU.

With the support of the Partnership, the two Thematic Portfolios are expected to increase transnational synergies at the EU scale, boost quadruple helix multi-stakeholder collaboration, and respond to the challenges and opportunities identified within each topic.

Several benefits to participate in the Thematic Portfolio are listed below:

- *Increased visibility at the international level*
- *Networking with quadruple-helix stakeholders*
- *Career boost especially for early career scientists*
- *Identification of new opportunities for cooperation*
- *Identification of potential beneficiaries of the project outputs*
- *Co-design market uptake plans*
- *Meetings with EU Commission experts*
- *Participation to SBEP events (e.g. symposium)*

This document outlines the Implementation Plan for Thematic Portfolio 1 on *Innovations and digitalisation for low-impact sustainable small-scale fisheries management in EU sea-basins.*

3. Thematic Portfolio sub-topics and projects

The Thematic Portfolio projects were selected through an open call for expressions of interest open from July to November 2025, based on their eligibility and on the synergies that may be developed with other projects, in terms of the R&I activities covered.

Project Title and Acronym	Source of funding	Duration	R&I Activities covered (according to the text of the call for expressions of interest, see detailed description in annex)		
			Reduction of environmental impacts of small-scale fisheries	Sustainable management of small-scale fisheries considering the impact and societal costs of stressors such as habitat degradation, pollution, and climate change	Economic sustainability of small-scale fisheries
CAFF Transitioning towards low-impact carbon-neutral fisheries	EMFAF	1/5/2024 – 1/6/2027	☒	☒	☒
OPTIFISH Optimisation of digital catch monitoring and reporting in European fisheries	FARM2FORK	1/2/2024 – 31/1/2028	☐	☒	☐

DORIS Development of Modular and Mobile By-Product and Wastes Bio-refinery Valorisation Systems and Supporting Structures for Fisheries and Aquaculture SME Industries	SBEP Call 2	15/7/2025 – 15/7/2028	☒	☐	☒
NETTAG+ Preventing, avoiding and mitigating environmental impacts of fishing gear and associated marine litter	Mission Ocean and Waters	1/5/2023 – 30/4/2026	☐	☐	☒

4. Thematic Portfolio Governance

The Thematic Portfolio is a light networking instrument with a dedicated governance framework, composed of:

- **The Thematic Portfolio Board** – decision-making body of the Thematic Portfolio Board, it is composed of the Partnership General Assembly Members. The Board is responsible for approving the list of selected projects in the portfolio, provide support and guidance to the projects during the portfolio implementation, and oversee the monitoring of the activities.

- **The Thematic Portfolio Secretariat** – coordinates the portfolio implementation, by organizing the regular meetings, provides the platform to exchange information, and is the primary contact point for portfolio members. The Thematic Portfolio Secretariat is the ANR.

- **Thematic Portfolio Facilitator** – part of the Secretariat, the Facilitator provide input for brokerage events, identifying synergies among the projects. The Facilitator is **Claire Hellio (ANR)**.

- **Thematic Portfolio Chair(s)** – identified during the kick-off meeting, the Chair supports the Secretariat and Facilitator in preparing and moderating the discussions when necessary during the portfolio implementation phase. During the kick-off, the projects decided to have rotating Chairs. **Jade Maes (OPTIFISH)** will be Chair for the first year of implementation (2026-2027), and the second year's Chair remains to be identified.

II. IMPLEMENTATION PLAN AND ACTIVITIES

This part outlines the portfolio implementation activities and results from discussions among the thematic portfolio projects during the first quarter after the kick-off meeting. This Implementation Plan has been designed collaboratively with the projects so that the activities are tailored to the portfolio projects' needs. As it is a living document, it may be subject to modifications while the Thematic Portfolio is in implementation phase.

As a result of the kick-off meeting held on February 12th in Bucharest, in hybrid format (see milestones, p.11), working themes and activities were tentatively identified during several brainstorming sessions, and developed in greater detail in the first months of implementation. The table on the next page is the result of this discussion.

1. Synergies table – identification of working themes and associated networking activities

Thematic Portfolio – Synergies									
Projet	Main focus	Thematics (as outlined in the call)			Synergies identified during the kick-off				
		Reduction of environmental impacts of small-scale fisheries	Sustainable management of small-scale fisheries considering the impaxt and societal costs of stressors such as habitat degradation, pollution and climate change	Economic sustainability of small-scale fisheries	Data sharing	Gear tracking and traceability	Engagement and capacity building	AI & machine learning	Policy and regulatory alignment
OPTIFISH	Digital transition and data-driven fisheries management.		•		•	•	•	•	•
DORIS	Biorefinery valorisation of seafood processing wastes	•		•	•		•		•
NETTAG+	Reducing abandoned, lost, or otherwise discarded fishing gear (ALDFG)	•			•	•	•	• need to share if data can be shared (ongoing work)	•
CAFF	Sustainable fisheries management, energy transition, and conservation of marine biodiversity	•	•	•	CAFF could help identifying AI-assistance tools or fishing gear modifications for saving fuel or lower impact when operating the fishing		•		•

	Data sharing	Gear tracking and traceability	Engagement and capacity building	AI & machine learning	Policy and regulatory alignment
Opportunities	Data sharing only --> for instance, NETTAG+ environmental impacts, esults of exp. carried out, results of workshops prepared ; DORIS share collated data on EU basins fish resources (quantified) and wastes arisings; ; MOVE TO DATA SHARING: CAFF could share a dataset on the technical and economic feasibility of implementing solutions for energy transition and lower the environmental impact	- NETTAG+: Dissemination to other portfolio members	Joint projects workshop combining sustainable practices (CAFF), digital tools (OPTIFISH), marine litter from fisheries and ghost net prevention (NETTAG+), and environmental awareness and waste management (DORIS) - fishers' representative / organizations could be invited for instance	Shared AI models: NETTAG+ sonar-based ALDFG classification (tbc), OPTIFISH catch data analytics	Potential outcome (to be asses for year 2 depending on the synergies)
Proposed networking activities (reminder: indicative objective is 1 networking activity / year)	Data sharing	Dissemination of information/tech to other portfolio members	workshop with potentially other projects	information sharing	paper (TBC)

*objective: validate the activities proposed in 'opportunities' or propose alternatives

Most preferred activities to develop in the Thematic Portfolio:

- Webinars (to SBEP partnes and/or to other stakeholders)
- Cross-project synthesis paper (on paper)
- Production of educational content to popularize project resuts for the general public
- Data sharing and collaboration activities
- Development of joint recommendations (policy brief, opinion paper)

Other activities proposed during the kick-off:
- comparative analysis, development of standardised joint protocols or bestpractices
- training to young researchers

Expectations from the projects (during kick off)

- Future collaborations
- Shared knowledge
- Network
- Exchange knowledge, experience and challenges
- Identify interested stakeholders
- Identify pathways to market

Portfolio members identified five working areas based on the focus of their projects and the connections foreseen with the other portfolio members:

- Data sharing
- Gear tracking and traceability
- Engagement and capacity building
- AI & machine learning
- Policy and regulatory alignment

Subsequently, networking activities to be developed have been identified :

- Data and information sharing (dissemination to other portfolio members)
- Thematic joint projects' workshops (where other projects may be invited)
- Joint paper drafting (to be confirmed, depending on the synergies found in the first year of implementation)

2. Identified networking activities

As the Thematic Portfolio is primarily designed to be a light networking instrument, project members agreed to set an objective of one networking activity per year for each project. Based on the discussion above, the following timeline is proposed for the Implementation Plan:

First year of implementation (2026-2027) ***Focus: Getting to know each other and work on the synergies***	Second year of implementation (2027-2028) ***Focus: Joint networking activities with external projects/stakeholders, dissemination of the portfolio outputs***
- Data and information sharing, dissemination of projects' results to the others	- Thematic joint projects' online workshop(s), where other projects may be invited - Paper drafting (TDB depending on the synergies identified in year 1)

3. Frequency of portfolio meetings

In order to ensure the follow up of the Thematic Portfolio implementation, **internal online update meetings will be held every 2 months**. These regular update meetings will focus on the update of activities, exchanging information, and address other subjects of interest for the portfolio members. These meetings can include keynote speakers, either recommended by the portfolio members or the Secretariat, to open the discussion on a topic of interest for the group.

A **mid-term portfolio meeting** will take place, either online or physically back-to-back with a Partnership event. This meeting will allow the portfolio members to network and will also be an opportunity to assess the first year of implementation based, the update of activities and perspectives for the second year of implementation. During this meeting, the election of the rotating Chair for the second year will also be addressed.

The Thematic Portfolio final event, to be held physically back-to-back with a SBEP event, will be focused on the outcomes of this networking action.

4. Inclusion of other projects in this portfolio

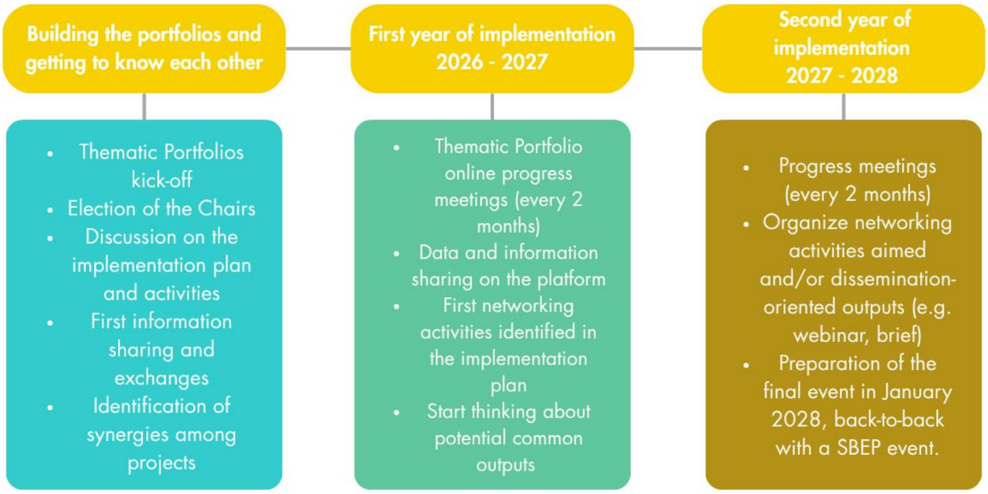
The inclusion of other projects to this portfolio was addressed during the kick-off meeting. It was agreed that other projects may be invited to events organized by the portfolio when relevant.

III. IMPLEMENTATION MILESTONES AND KPIs

Although the Thematic Portfolio action is relatively light in scope and primarily focused on networking, milestones and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) have been identified to frame the action and its objectives, and were discussed with portfolio members during the kick-off meeting.

1. Implementation phases

The following implementation phases were presented during the kick-off meeting:



2. Milestones and KPIs

This part outlines the milestones and KPIs created together with the thematic portfolio projects. As the instrument is a light networking tool, the objective is to frame the action and activities using indicative milestones and KPIs.

A. Milestones

- February 12th, 2026: Thematic Portfolio kick-off
- April/May 2026: Who is who brochure
- May 2026: Implementation Plan, final draft
- By the end of 2026: At least 1 networking activity
- December 2026 – January 2027: Portfolio physical midterm meeting
- By the end of 2027: At least 1 networking activity
- Early 2028: Final portfolio workshop, back-to-back with a SBEP event (to showcase portfolio results)

B. KPIs

The following list of KPIs is indicative and results from a discussion with the Portfolio Members during the kick-off meeting. Their completion will be therefore assessed based on the portfolio members' declarations, through short surveys in mid-term (end of 2026) and end of implementation (end of 2027/early 2028).

These KPIs will also be an indicator for the final report which will be drafted by the Secretariat.

KPI (on an indicative basis)	Description	Indicative target in the 2 years of action
Engagement in the Thematic Portfolio activities (engagement rate)	Each project to take part in at least 1 joint activities of the Thematic Portfolio	1 networking activity per portfolio project
Number of identified connections between portfolio projects	Number of connections between projects during the action.	At least 1 or 2 connections found per project
Shared data and resources	Number of projects that managed to share data and resources (e.g. data, tools, methodology, protocols, best practices) with other projects in the portfolio.	At least 2 projects

Number of webinars/events (co-) organized	Number of events organized or co-organized within the framework of the action.	At least 1each year
Common outputs and productions	Number of documents jointly produced, with at least 2 projects involved (policy brief, opinion paper, best practices note, …).	At least 1 joint output
Dissemination of common results, within and outside the SBEP.	Dissemination through internal and external communication channels.	Internal communication: share updates about the portfolio every 6 months, through the SBEP newsletter. External communication: maintain regular updates on the portfolio LinkedIn page, posting at least 2-3 times per trimester, including original posts and reposts from portfolio projects. All portfolio key documentation (i.e. Implementation Plan, Who-is-Who brochure) will be posted on the SBEP website when validated by end of June 2026.
Global satisfaction	% of projects declaring that the Thematic portfolio action was useful for their project.	95%

IV. COMMUNICATION AND DISSEMINATION

This part of the document addresses the internal and external communication, and dissemination. One of the objectives of the Thematic Portfolio action is to provide the portfolio projects with the platform and framework to boost networking activities, and increase the visibility of the projects and their outcomes. This communication and dissemination strategy targets different channels: the internal communication within the portfolio, the promotion of the portfolio activities and connectivity with the SBEP community, and external quadruple-helix stakeholders (academia, industry, governments, and civil society).

This communication and dissemination plan may be subject to modifications during the portfolio implementation.

1. Portfolio internal communication

In order to simplify information exchange and data sharing – i.e. data extracted from the portfolio projects' deliverables, for instance – a dedicated Sharepoint was created. Among the different functionalities, the projects are given access to a dedicated chat to exchange information, as well as dedicated folders where they can share key documentation and data. On this platform, projects are also invited to share relevant information about future events.

The regular update meetings, held every 2 months, is also seen as a key communication channel. During these meetings, portfolio projects are given the opportunity to share their results, discuss common thematic areas, and address future opportunities. These regular update meetings are also the occasion for the Secretariat to update the portfolio projects about the ongoing activities in the Partnership, that are relevant to the portfolio topic. During these meetings, keynotes will be scheduled to launch the discussion of the day or open new perspectives for exchange.

In addition to the regular meetings, projects are encouraged to do bilateral exchanges, which may be facilitated by the Portfolio Secretariat if necessary.

Projects are encouraged to regularly share key news or information to the other portfolio projects, notably by email or through the Sharepoint.

2. Communication to the SBEP Community

Smooth communication between the portfolio and the whole SBEP community will be facilitated by the Secretariat, with the support of the portfolio projects, through different channels:

- **Regular updates through the SBEP governing meetings**: The Secretariat will regularly communicate about the key portfolio activities during the Partnership governing meetings (ExComm, General Assembly, Steering Committee), when relevant. The objective is to bring awareness of the initiative and its outcomes through the community.
- **Regular contributions to the SBEP newsletter**: the portfolio Secretariat will include key updates about the portfolio activities in this format, circulated every trimester approximately.
- **Bilateral contact with other relevant SBEP projects**: The Secretariat will create links with other SBEP co-funded projects, when relevant to the portfolio activities. Other SBEP projects, for example, will be invited to join the portfolio open events or webinars and will be invited to present their results during the portfolio update meetings as a keynote.
- **Communication with the other Thematic Portfolio on algae cultivations**: Communication between the two thematic portfolios, implemented at the same time, will be promoted by the Secretariat when relevant.

3. External Communication

In order to support the visibility of the portfolio projects, the Secretariat will create dedicated communication platforms, using the SBEP website and social media. In addition, measures are proposed to disseminate the portfolio results to other external stakeholders addressed sustainable algae cultivations and circularity, including quadruple-helix stakeholders (academia, governments, industry and civil society).

A. Thematic Portfolio webpage and social media

In the first months of implementation (M1 to M3), information about the Thematic Portfolio will be added on the Partnership website ([Thematic Portfolios [2026-2028] | Bluepartnership]), which is the primary communication and information platform of the Partnership. This page will feature key information about the Thematic Portfolio, its members, aim and objectives. The portfolio documentation and common outputs will also be uploaded on this page.

Fig. 1: Thematic Portfolio webpage

In addition, a LinkedIn page will be created to showcase the portfolios' networking activities, and allow the projects to easily share information to their networks. The projects' LinkedIn posts will be shared on this page for more visibility. This page is managed by the Secretariat and common to the two Thematic Portfolios, in order to maximize their visibility. The page can be accessed here: https://www.linkedin.com/showcase/thematic-portfolios-of-projects-blue-partnership/.

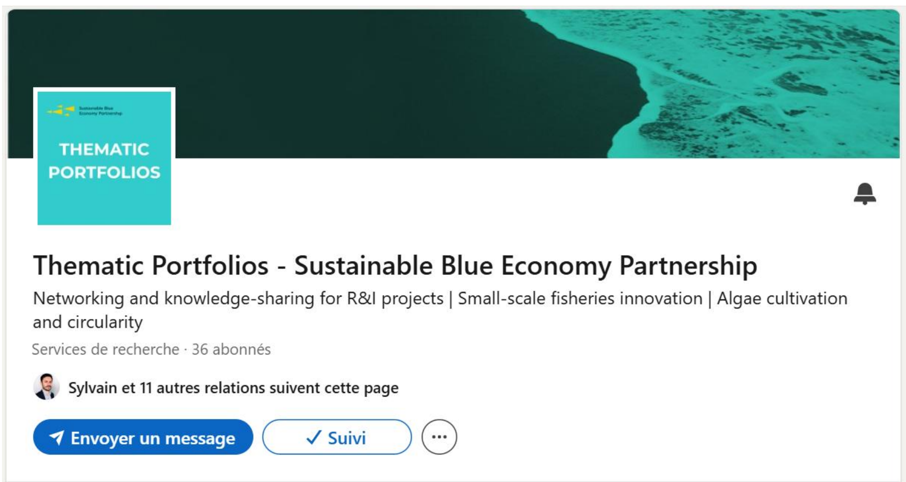


Fig. 2: Thematic Portfolio LinkedIn page

B. Who-is-Who Brochure

The “Who-is-Who” brochure is the first dissemination activity of the Thematic Portfolio. It aims to introduce each portfolio project with public-oriented content. This brochure includes key information from the projects: name/title, key themes, funding source, sea basins addressed, the project duration, summary, PI’s biography and contact details, and some words about the project’s motivation.

This format was developed as a first follow-up to the kick-off meeting, based on the content provided by the member projects. The brochure will be uploaded on the Thematic Portfolio webpage and posted on LinkedIn.

Fig. 3: Thematic Portfolio ‘Who-is-Who’ Brochure

C. SBEP Newsletter

Regular contributions to the Partnership newsletter, published every 2 months, will foster the portfolio visibility.

D. Communication and dissemination to external stakeholders

Throughout its implementation, the Portfolio will seek to disseminate its activities, targeting relevant quadruple-helix stakeholders (researchers, academia, national, EU, and international institutions, industry).

To this aim, the Secretariat will support the connectivity of the portfolio with other initiatives that are relevant to the portfolio topics. Connections will be made through participation to the portfolio meeting as keynote, for example.

The connection with other stakeholders, from the public and private sectors, is encouraged by the Secretariat through the different networking activities organized during the portfolio. This includes inviting these stakeholders to the portfolio events, or drawing connections during dedicated meetings, for example.

In this context, the portfolio activities will also be disseminated through the network of projects endorsed by the UN Decade for Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021 to 2030) ('the Ocean Decade').

ANNEX: DESCRIPTION OF THE R&I ACTIVITIES COVERED IN THE CALL FOR EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST

The Thematic Portfolio on Innovations and digitalization for low-impact sustainable small-scale fisheries management in EU sea-basins responds to the following targeted objective:

- *To support the sustainable management, the transitioning and the empowerment of small-scale fisheries, through industry co-development of innovative fishing techniques, new technological and digital tools, novel resources, and new practices*.

Expected types of R&I activities to be covered by the projects participating in the Portfolio are listed below.

1. Reduction of environmental impacts of small-scale fisheries

    - Pollution reduction from fishing activities

- *The development of innovative fishing gears using: (i) biodegradable materials that decompose within defined timeframes to prevent long-term environmental persistence, and (ii) trackable materials with embedded monitoring technologies to enable gear recovery and reduce gear loss, both aimed at minimizing ghost fishing impacts. The development of new on-board practices to reduce material lost and waste (reduction of on-board plastic use and promotion of waste collection and recycling)*
- *The development of digital tools for data collection and real-time monitoring (fishing effort, stock and catch data, restricted zones) to reduce the carbon footprint of the fishing industry*
- *The development of AI and sensor technologies to enhance surveillance monitoring system and decision-making*.

    - Bycatch reduction

- *The development of selective fishing gear incorporating appropriate mesh sizes and escape devices for juveniles and protected species, while integrating fish welfare considerations and traceability systems to minimise environmental impact. The development of detection or deterrent technologies to avoid accidental catches of marine megafauna (e.g. marine mammals, birds, large fish, sea turtles). The R&I needs identified in this subtheme is connected to EU Directives such as the Birds and Habitats Directives).*

2. Sustainable management of small-scale fisheries considering the impact and societal costs of stressors such as habitat degradation, pollution and climate change

- The development of digital monitoring tools for responsive, informed management in the face of multiple stressors e.g. tools to investigate shifts in migratory fish stocks due to ocean warming.

- The diversification of target species to reduce pressure on overexploited populations and enable the utilization of emerging catches.

3. Economic sustainability of small-scale fisheries

- The understanding of species' roles in trophic webs and their growth potential, within frameworks of biodiversity resilience and sustainability, to inform practical management tools aligned with stakeholder needs.
- The analysis of socioeconomic drivers of change in commercial fisheries to guide small-scale fisheries, economic, and regional development strategies.