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European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF)

Call for proposals

Improving scientific knowledge to strengthen the science-basis of management decisions under the common fisheries policy
(EMFAF-2027-PIA-ScientificAdviceFisheries)

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EUROPEAN CLIMATE, INFRASTRUCTURE AND ENVIRONMENT EXECUTIVE AGENCY (CINEA)

CINEA.D – Natural Resources, Climate, Sustainable Blue Economy and Clean Energy
CINEA.D.3 – Sustainable Blue Economy

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

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0. Introduction

This is a call for proposals in the field of Scientific Advice for Fisheries under the **European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF)**.

The regulatory framework for this EU Funding Programme is set out in:

- Regulation 2024/2509 (EU Financial Regulation)[1]
- the basic act (EMFAF Regulation 2021/1139[2]).

The call is launched in accordance with the 2026-2027 Work Programme[3], action 2.1.2. Improving scientific knowledge to strengthen the science-basis of management decisions under the common fisheries policy (CFP) and will be managed by the **European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency (CINEA)** ('Agency').

The call covers the following **topic**:

- **EMFAF-2027-PIA-ScientificAdviceFisheries – Improving scientific knowledge to strengthen the science-basis of fisheries management decisions under the common fisheries policy (CFP)**

CINEA expect to fund up to 3-4 projects.

We invite you to read the **call documentation** carefully, and in particular this Call document, the Model Grant Agreement, the EU Funding & Tenders Portal Online Manual and the EU Grants AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement.

These documents provide clarifications and answers to questions you may have when preparing your application:

- the Call document outlines the:
  - background, objectives, scope, activities that can be funded and the expected results (sections 1 and 2)
  - timetable and available budget (sections 3 and 4)
  - admissibility and eligibility conditions (including mandatory documents; sections 5 and 6)
  - criteria for financial and operational capacity and exclusion (section 7)
  - evaluation and award procedure (section 8)
  - award criteria (section 9)
  - legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements (section 10)

[1] Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2024/2509 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 September 2024 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union (recast) ('EU Financial Regulation') (OJ L, 2024/2509, 26.9.2024).

[2] Regulation (EU) 2021/1139 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 July 2021 establishing the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (OJ L 247, 13.7.2021, p. 1).

[3] Commission Implementing Decision C(2025) 8531 final of 12.12.2025 concerning the adoption of the work programme for 2026 and 2027 and the financing decision for the implementation of the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund.

  - how to submit an application (section 11)

- the Online Manual outlines the:
  - procedures to register and submit proposals online via the EU Funding & Tenders Portal ('Portal')
  - recommendations for the preparation of the application
- the AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement contains:
  - detailed annotations on all the provisions in the Grant Agreement you will have to sign in order to obtain the grant *(including cost eligibility, payment schedule, accessory obligations, etc)*.

You are also encouraged to visit EU Funding & Tenders Portal to consult the list of projects funded previously (EMFAF-2023-PIA-FisheriesScientificAdvice and EMFAF-2025-PIA-FisheriesScientificAdvice).

1. Background

One of the main principles of good governance applied to the common fisheries policy (CFP)[4] is that management measures must be based on the *best available scientific advice*.

The success of the CFP relies heavily on this advice, which in turn depends on the timely availability of relevant supporting data on fisheries. To support this, the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) funds data collection and processing by Member States via shared management, while also financing direct management initiatives to ensure an effective, knowledge-based implementation of the CFP.

Developing scientific knowledge is a continuous and increasingly demanding process. Advice is now required for a broader range of conservation and management challenges, including:

- **Ecosystem approaches**: Implementing multispecies and ecosystem assessments to support an Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM),
- **Long-term planning**: Developing multiannual recovery and management plans, as well as management strategy evaluations,
- **Conservation measures**: Designing technical measures and mitigating the incidental catch of vulnerable or sensitive species

These challenges are evident across multiple maritime regions as highlighted below but not limited to the following examples: the Baltic Sea where greater emphasis should be placed on complex ecosystem dynamics and multiple environmental pressures; the Bay of Biscay and adjacent Atlantic waters, where there is a need to incorporate ecosystem considerations into management and assessment frameworks to better understand fisheries dynamics; and the Mediterranean and Black Sea, where, despite progress in reducing fishing pressure, a large percentage of assessed stocks remain overexploited.

[4] Common fisheries policy (CFP) - Oceans and fisheries - European Commission. Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 on the Common Fisheries Policy, amending Council Regulations (EC) No 1954/2003 and (EC) No 1224/2009 and repealing Council Regulations (EC) No 2371/2002 and (EC) No 639/2004 and Council Decision 2004/585/EC. http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2013/1380/oj

Similar challenges extend beyond EU waters, including in West Africa, where the EU fleet operates under Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements (SFPAs) — and the overexploitation of certain stocks demands urgent attention. The primary bodies providing advice to the European Commission -such as STECF[5], ICES[6], JRC[7], regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs)[8] and national research institutes- all require additional resources to meet these growing demands.

For instance, while the data collected by Member States under the Data Collection Framework (DCF) is improving, resources shortages mean some data (such as survey samples) remains unexploited. These bottlenecks can constrain the quality of advice for specific stocks and highlight the need for more efficient, automated sample-processing methodologies.

This call for proposals specifically targets gaps in scientific knowledge required for CFP implementation. This call for proposals is not intended to support general marine research or market-ready commercial innovation. However, it highly encourages projects that promote progress beyond the current state of the art in science applied to fisheries management. This call builds on two previous iterations launched in 2023[9] and 2024[10], which collectively awarded funding to eleven projects[11] across a variety of topics.

2. Objectives — Themes and priorities — Activities that can be funded — Expected impact - Indicators

Objectives

The primary objective of this Call for Proposals is to develop and strengthen the scientific knowledge required to support science-based fisheries conservation and management measures. Scientific advice for fisheries should support the maintenance of long-term scientific capacity, regional cooperation networks and knowledge transfer between data collection, assessment and advisory communities. Sustained expertise is essential for ensuring the continuity and quality of European fisheries advice.

Themes and priorities (scope)

The core priorities of this call are to reinforce policy-oriented fisheries science, optimise the use of the collected scientific data, improve cooperation between scientists and the fisheries sector, and support the EU scientific community in developing and maintaining high-quality expertise.

Applicants must clearly identify in their proposals which of the following themes they will contribute to. Submitted projects must focus on **at least one** of the themes listed below (presented in no order of priority):

- **Data Optimisation**: To optimise biological sampling and data utilisation under the DCF, priority should be given to improving data interoperability, re-use, and integration across Member States. It comprises for example how existing

5 Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries

6 International Council for the Exploration of the Sea

7 Joint Research Centre - European Commission

8 Regional fisheries management organisations (RFMOs) - Oceans and fisheries

9 EMFAF-2023-PIA-FisheriesScientificAdvice | EU Funding & Tenders Portal

10 EMFAF-2025-PIA-FisheriesScientificAdvice | EU Funding & Tenders Portal

11 CINEA article June 2024: Six projects to improve scientific knowledge on fisheries are ready to kick off CINEA article November 2025: Five new EU funded projects will advance scientific knowledge for fisheries - European Commission

data can be reused to ensure deeper understanding of stock structures and species interactions. Furthermore, digitalisation initiatives must be leveraged to enhance and reinforce - rather than substitute - the core scientific evidence base that underpins assessments and advice.

- **Knowledge Updates**: To improve or update the available scientific knowledge supporting fisheries conservation and management measures within the CFP context. Increase understanding of stock structures, life histories, food webs, multi-species interactions, and cumulative effects (see also below).

- **Operationalisation of Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management** (EAFM): To advance the EAFM, scientific advice for fisheries (SAF) should drive the creation of practical tools and indicators. The purpose is to operationalise ecosystem-based management by embedding biological, environmental, and socioeconomic information directly into routine assessments and scientific advice.

- **Climate Adaptation**: To meet the objective of adapting the CFP scientific advice to climate and ecosystem shifts, research must deliver climate-resilient management frameworks. This includes developing methods to track changing stock productivity, shifting distributions, ecosystem reorganisation, and rising uncertainty, with a strong emphasis on adaptive management approaches.

- **Addressing Cumulative Pressures on Aquatic Ecosystems**: To better monitor and understand human impacts on fisheries, research must address the cumulative pressures threatening fish stocks and aquatic ecosystems. This requires evaluating the combined effects of climate change, habitat degradation, eutrophication, and offshore developments, alongside competing marine and freshwater space uses.

- **Human Activity Threats**: Increase monitoring and understanding of the impacts of other human activities and threats on fisheries stocks and linked ecosystems.

- **Emerging Commercial Stocks**: Identify commercial stocks non-quota stocks and non-targeted stocks that could gain economic importance due to mid- to long- term climate and environmental changes, and strengthen the knowledge required to manage them.

- **Vulnerable Species & Habitats**: Strengthen scientific and operational knowledge to monitor and assess fisheries' impacts on sensitive species and habitats. This includes identifying biologically sensitive areas, by-catch hot-spots, and mitigation measures (e.g. developing Marine Protected Areas [MPA] or establishing additional measures and monitoring tools within existing MPAs).

Activities that can be funded (scope)

To achieve these objectives, eligible actions may include, but are not limited to:

- **Fieldwork**: collecting and processing samples or data in the field that fall outside the scope of national data collection programmes. Collection of new data shall only take place when duly justified, related to a specific and identified need.

- **Research & Modelling**: conducting trials, meta-analysis, and model development, improvement, testing, or validation.

- **Data Preparation**: optimising and re-use of existing data, validating and preparing data to feed into management models.

Activities can contribute to more than one theme.

Early and meaningful involvement of policy stakeholders and industry (e.g. fishers) is encouraged throughout the project from data collection and the development of scientific advice to the communication of results. Their participation can facilitate access to data and samples, improve the feasibility of project methods, and help ensure that research addresses practical fisheries management needs.

Expected impact

Applicants will describe in their proposals the concrete and measurable results within the duration of the project and their expected impact, including indicators for the monitoring and measurement of progress.

The project activities should result in the following expected impacts:

- Improved available knowledge to the EU (and global) fisheries scientific community, thus directly improving the science-base for the fisheries conservation and management measures designed in the context of the CFP.

- Better integration and uptake of project results into the established scientific advice for fisheries management process and, when relevant, the possibility to use/transfer the outcomes to other countries/regions.

Projects are expected to deliver concrete and operational results that can be directly used by scientific bodies responsible for providing fisheries advice.

Applicants must therefore:

- Identify in their proposals the main target groups/forums in which their results will be considered to feed scientific advice processes for fisheries management (i.e. ICES, STECF, RFMOs, regional coordination groups under the DCF, advisory councils, etc.); and

- Set out a credible pathway for the uptake[12] and integration of project results/data into established scientific advisory processes. This pathway should also demonstrate how data will flow from relevant scientific bodies/specific expert groups to format testing and validation. It should include a limited number of project-specific indicators and milestones[13] to monitor progress towards this objective.

- Describe the planned approach to stakeholder engagement and explain how the involvement of the fishing sector, where relevant, will contribute to the achievement, validation and uptake of project results.

These will be evaluated under the Impact award criterion.

[12] Depending on the nature of the project, this may include, for example, testing a new method against existing approaches, validation by a relevant scientific body, presentation and discussion of results within relevant scientific or advisory fora, provision of data or analytical tools in a format suitable for direct use in scientific assessments, or formal consideration of a new methodology, dataset or evidence base for incorporation into established advisory processes. Examples of relevant fora may include, for illustrative purposes, working groups or workshops organised by ICES, STECF, RFMOs and other scientific or advisory bodies.

[13] Relevant milestones may include completion of a validation exercise, acceptance of a method or dataset for testing or use by a scientific body, incorporation of project outputs into an assessment or analytical workflow, or formal consideration of the results by the relevant advisory body.

Where relevant, applicants must explain the added value of their proposals in relation to similar actions implemented under national EMFAF Operational Programmes (shared management), e.g. Data Collection Framework (DCF) or monitoring programmes, under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive and the EU Birds Directive and Habitats Directive. This will be evaluated under Relevance.

For more information about scientific advice under CFP, *see EC website on scientific advice and data collection*.

Indicators

Applicants must outline their main project results[14] in a concrete, realistic and quantified manner. Results should align with the relevant EMFAF[15] common indicators listed below (only relevant indicators should be considered):

- CR 01 - New production capacity (tonnes/annum)
- CR 03 - Businesses created (number of entities)
- CR 04 - Businesses with higher turnover (number of entities)
- CR 06 - Jobs created (number of persons)
- CR 07 - Jobs maintained (number of persons)
- CR 08 - Persons benefitting (number of persons)
- CR 09 - Area addressed by operations contributing to a good environmental status, protecting, conserving, and restoring biodiversity and ecosystems (km2 or km)
- CR 10 - Actions contributing to a good environmental status, including nature restoration, conservation, protection of ecosystems, biodiversity, animal health and welfare (number of actions)
- CR 11 - Entities increasing social sustainability (number of entities)
- CR 13 - Cooperation activities between stakeholders (number of actions)
- CR 14 - Innovations enabled (number of new products, services, processes, business models or methods)
- CR 16 - Entities benefitting from promotion and information activities (number of entities)
- CR 17 - Entities improving resource efficiency in production and/or processing (number of entities)
- CR 18 - Energy consumption leading to CO2 emissions reduction (kWh/tonnes or litres/h)
- CR 19 - Actions to improve governance capacity (number of actions)
- CR 20 - Investment induced (EUR)

[14] Results: capture more direct, short to medium term changes in a situation, which are achieved by the end of the project. E.g. if four FTE jobs are expected to be created by the end of the project, this will be an expected project result.

[15] Common indicators of the EMFAF are divided in core performance indicators (CI), result indicators (CR) and output indicators (OI) and listed in Annex I of EMFAF Regulation 2021/1139

— CR 21 - Datasets and advice made available (number)

— CR 22 - Usage of data and information platforms (number of page views)

3. Available budget

The estimated available call budget is **EUR 1 800 000**.

We expect to fund up to 3-4 projects.

We reserve the right not to award all available funds, depending on the proposals received and the results of the evaluation.

4. Timetable and deadlines

Timetable and deadlines (indicative)	
Call opening:	12 November 2026
Deadline for submission:	23 February 2027 – 17:00:00 CET (Brussels)
Evaluation:	March-May 2027
Information on evaluation results:	May-June 2027
GA signature:	October/November 2027

5. Admissibility and documents

Proposals must be submitted before the **call deadline** *(see timetable section 4)*.

Proposals must be submitted **electronically** via the Funding & Tenders Portal Electronic Submission System (accessible via the Topic page in the Search EU Funding & Tenders Portal section). Paper submissions are NOT possible.

Proposals (including annexes and supporting documents) must be submitted using the forms provided *inside* the Submission System (⚠ NOT the documents available on the Topic page — they are only for information).

Proposals must be **complete** and contain all the requested information and all required annexes and supporting documents:

- Application Form Part A — contains administrative information about the participants (future coordinator, beneficiaries and affiliated entities) and the summarised budget for the project *(to be filled in directly online)*
- Application Form Part B — contains the technical description of the project *(template to be downloaded from the Portal Submission System, completed, assembled and re-uploaded)*
- **mandatory annexes and supporting documents** *(templates to be downloaded from the Portal Submission System, completed, assembled and re-uploaded)*:
  - detailed budget table: not applicable
  - CVs of core project team: not applicable
  - activity reports of last year: not applicable

- list of previous projects (key projects for the last 4 years) *(template available in Part B)*

A detailed budget table is available for information on Portal Reference Documents. You are NOT obliged to use it to prepare your project budget, nor upload it with your application, but you will be requested to provide it later on, if you are selected for funding.

Please note that the amounts entered into the summarised budget table (filled in directly online) must correspond to the amounts calculated in the detailed budget table. In case of discrepancies, the amounts in the online summarised budget table will prevail.

At proposal submission, you will have to confirm that you have the **mandate to act** for all applicants. Moreover, you will have to confirm that the information in the application is correct and complete and that all participants comply with the conditions for receiving EU funding *(especially eligibility, financial and operational capacity, exclusion, etc)*. Before signing the grant, each beneficiary and affiliated entity will have to confirm this again by signing a declaration of honour (DoH). Proposals without full support will be rejected.

Your application must be **readable**, **accessible and printable** (please check carefully the layout of the documents uploaded).

Proposals are limited to maximum **40 pages** (Part B). Evaluators will not consider any additional pages.

You may be asked at a later stage for further documents *(for legal entity validation, financial capacity check, bank account validation, etc)*.

For more information about the submission process (including IT aspects), consult the Online Manual.

6. Eligibility

Applications will only be considered eligible if their content corresponds wholly (or at least in part) to the topic description for which they are submitted.

Eligible participants (eligible countries)

In order to be eligible, the applicants (beneficiaries and affiliated entities) must:

- be legal entities (public or private bodies)
- be established in one of the eligible countries, i.e.:
  - EU Member States (including overseas countries and territories (OCTs))
- be research centres, institutes, universities, foundations and scientific bodies primarily active in fisheries science or in marine science applied to fisheries management.

Beneficiaries and affiliated entities must register in the Participant Register — before submitting the proposal — and will have to be validated by the Central Validation Service (REA Validation). For the validation, they will be requested to upload documents showing legal status and origin.

Other entities may participate in other consortium roles, such as associated partners, subcontractors, third parties giving in-kind contributions, etc *(see section 13)*.

Specific cases and definitions

Natural persons — Natural persons are NOT eligible (with the exception of self-employed persons, i.e. sole traders, where the company does not have legal personality separate from that of the natural person).

International organisations — International organisations are eligible. The rules on eligible countries do not apply to them.

Entities without legal personality — Entities which do not have legal personality under their national law may exceptionally participate, provided that their representatives have the capacity to undertake legal obligations on their behalf, and offer guarantees for the protection of the EU financial interests equivalent to that offered by legal persons[16].

EU bodies — EU bodies (with the exception of the European Commission Joint Research Centre) can NOT be part of the consortium.

Associations and interest groupings — Entities composed of members may participate as 'sole beneficiaries' or 'beneficiaries without legal personality'[17]. ⚠ Please note that if the action will be implemented by the members, they should also participate (either as beneficiaries or as affiliated entities, otherwise their costs will NOT be eligible).

EU restrictive measures — Special rules apply for entities subject to EU restrictive measures under Article 29 of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU) and Article 215 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU)[18]. Such entities are not eligible to participate in any capacity, including as beneficiaries, affiliated entities, associated partners, subcontractors or recipients of financial support to third parties (if any).

ℹ For more information, *see Rules for Legal Entity Validation, LEAR Appointment and Financial Capacity Assessment*.

Consortium composition

Proposals must be submitted by a consortium of at least 2 applicants (beneficiaries; not affiliated entities), which complies with the following conditions:

- minimum 2 independent entities from 2 different EU Member States.

The coordinator must be established in an EU Member State.

Eligible activities

Applications will only be considered eligible if their content corresponds wholly (or at least in part) to the topic description for which they are submitted.

Eligible activities are the ones set out in section 2 above.

When relevant, projects should take into account the results of projects supported by other EU funding programmes. The complementarities must be described in the project proposals (Part B of the Application Form).

Projects must comply with EU policy interests and priorities *(such as environment, social, security, industrial and trade policy, etc)*. Projects must also respect EU values

16 See Article 200(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation 2024/2509.

17 For the definitions, see Articles 190(2) and 200(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation 2024/2509.

18 Please note that the EU Official Journal contains the official list and, in case of conflict, its content prevails over that of the EU Sanctions Map.

and European Commission policy regarding reputational matters (*e.g. activities involving capacity building, policy support, awareness raising, communication, dissemination, etc*).

Financial support to third parties is not allowed.

Duration

Projects should normally range between 18 and 36 months.

Extensions are possible, if duly justified and through an amendment.

Project budget

Project budgets (requested grant amount) are expected to range between EUR 400 000 and EUR 600 000 per project.

This does not however preclude the submission/selection of proposals requesting other amounts. The grant awarded may be lower than the amount requested.

Ethics

Projects must comply with:

- highest ethical standards and
- applicable EU, international and national law (including Directive 98/58[19], Regulation 1099/2009[20], and Regulation (889/2008[21]).

Projects must pay particular attention to the principle of proportionality, the need to ensure protection of the environment and high levels of animal welfare and human health protection.

Applicants must show in their application that they respect ethical principles and applicable regulatory framework.

Projects involving ethics issues may be made subject to specific ethics rules.

7. Financial and operational capacity and exclusion

Financial capacity

Applicants must have **stable and sufficient resources** to successfully implement the projects and contribute their share. Organisations participating in several projects must have sufficient capacity to implement all projects.

The financial capacity check will be carried out on the basis of the documents you will be requested to upload in the Participant Register during grant preparation *(e.g. profit and loss account and balance sheet, business plan, audit report produced by an approved external auditor, certifying the accounts for the last closed financial year, etc)*. The analysis will be based on neutral financial indicators, but will also take into account other aspects, such as dependency on EU funding and deficit and revenue in previous years.

[19] Council Directive 98/58/EC of 20 July 1998 concerning the protection of animals kept for farming purposes (OJ L 221, 8.8.1998, p. 23).

[20] Council Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009 of 24 September 2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing (OJ L 303, 18.11.2009, p. 1).

[21] Commission Regulation (EC) No 889/2008 of 5 September 2008 laying down detailed rules for the implementation of Council Regulation (EC) No 834/2007 on organic production and labelling of organic products with regard to organic production, labelling and control (OJ L 250, 18.9.2008, p. 1).

The check will normally be done for all beneficiaries, except:

- public bodies (entities established as public body under national law, including local, regional or national authorities) or international organisations
- if the individual requested grant amount is not more than EUR 60 000.

If needed, it may also be done for affiliated entities.

If we consider that your financial capacity is not satisfactory, we may require:

- further information
- an enhanced financial responsibility regime, i.e. joint and several responsibility for all beneficiaries or joint and several liability of affiliated entities *(see below, section 10)*
- prefinancing paid in instalments
- (one or more) prefinancing guarantees *(see below, section 10)*

or

- propose no prefinancing
- request that you are replaced or, if needed, reject the entire proposal.

For more information, *see* *Rules for Legal Entity Validation, LEAR Appointment and Financial Capacity Assessment*.

Operational capacity

Applicants must have the **know-how, qualifications** and **resources** to successfully implement the projects and contribute their share (including sufficient experience in projects of comparable size and nature).

This capacity will be assessed together with the 'Quality' award criterion, on the basis of the competence and experience of the applicants and their project teams, including operational resources (human, technical and other) or, exceptionally, the measures proposed to obtain it by the time the task implementation starts.

If the evaluation of the award criterion is positive, the applicants are considered to have sufficient operational capacity.

Applicants will have to show their capacity via the following information:

- general profiles (qualifications and experiences) of the staff responsible for managing and implementing the project
- description of the consortium participants
- list of previous projects (key projects for the last 4 years) *(template available in Part B)*.

Additional supporting documents may be requested, if needed to confirm the operational capacity of any applicant.

Public bodies, Member State organisations and international organisations are exempted from the operational capacity check.

Exclusion

Applicants which are subject to an **EU exclusion decision** or in one of the following **exclusion situations** that bar them from receiving EU funding can NOT participate[22]:

- bankruptcy, winding up, affairs administered by the courts, arrangement with creditors, suspended business activities or other similar procedures (including procedures for persons with unlimited liability for the applicant's debts)
- in breach of social security or tax obligations (including if done by persons with unlimited liability for the applicant's debts)
- guilty of grave professional misconduct[23] (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant)
- committed fraud, corruption, links to a criminal organisation, money laundering, terrorism-related crimes (including terrorism financing), child labour or human trafficking (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant)
- shown significant deficiencies in complying with main obligations under an EU procurement contract, grant agreement, prize, expert contract, or similar (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant)
- guilty of irregularities within the meaning of Article 1(2) of EU Regulation 2988/95 (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant)
- created under a different jurisdiction with the intent to circumvent fiscal, social or other legal obligations in the country of origin or created another entity with this purpose (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant)
- intentionally and without proper justification resisted[24] an investigation, check or audit carried out by an EU authorising officer (or their representative or auditor), OLAF, the EPPO, or the European Court of Auditors.

Applicants will also be rejected if it turns out that[25]:

- during the award procedure they misrepresented information required as a condition for participating or failed to supply that information

22 See Articles 138 and 143 of EU Financial Regulation 2024/2509.

23 'Professional misconduct' includes, in particular, the following: violation of ethical standards of the profession; wrongful conduct with impact on professional credibility; breach of generally accepted professional ethical standards; false declarations/misrepresentation of information; participation in a cartel or other agreement distorting competition; violation of IPR; attempting to influence decision-making processes by taking advantage, through misrepresentation, of a conflict of interests, or to obtain confidential information from public authorities to gain an advantage; incitement to discrimination, hatred or violence or similar activities contrary to the EU values where negatively affecting or risking to affect the performance of a legal commitment.

24 'Resisting an investigation, check or audit' means carrying out actions with the goal or effect of preventing, hindering or delaying the conduct of any of the activities needed to perform the investigation, check or audit, such as refusing to grant the necessary access to its premises or any other areas used for business purposes, concealing or refusing to disclose information or providing false information.

25 See Article 143 EU Financial Regulation 2024/2509.

- they were previously involved in the preparation of the call and this entails a distortion of competition that cannot be remedied otherwise (conflict of interest).

8. Evaluation and award procedure

The proposals will have to follow the **standard submission and evaluation procedure** (one-stage submission + one-step evaluation).

An **evaluation committee** will assess all applications. Proposals will first be checked for formal requirements (admissibility, and eligibility, *see sections 5 and 6*). Proposals found admissible and eligible will be evaluated (for each topic) against the operational capacity and award criteria *(see sections 7 and 9)* and then ranked according to their score.

For proposals with the same score (within a topic or budget envelope) a **priority order** will be determined according to the following approach:

Successively for every group of *ex aequo* proposals, starting with the highest scored group, and continuing in descending order:

1) Projects focusing on a theme and/or priority (as indicated in section 2) that is not otherwise covered by higher ranked projects will be considered to have the highest priority.

2) The ex aequo proposals within the same topic will be prioritised according to the scores they have been awarded for the award criterion 'Relevance'. When these scores are equal, priority will be based on their scores for the criterion 'Impact'.

3) If this does not allow to determine the priority, a further prioritisation can be done by considering the overall project portfolio and the creation of positive synergies between projects, or other factors related to the objectives of the call. These factors will be documented in the panel report.

4) After that, the remainder of the available call budget will be used to fund projects across the different topics in order to ensure a balanced spread of the geographical and thematic coverage and while respecting to the maximum possible extent the order of merit based on the evaluation of the award criteria.

All proposals will be informed about the evaluation result (**evaluation result letter**). Successful proposals will be invited for grant preparation; the other ones will be put on the reserve list or rejected.

⚠ No commitment for funding — Invitation to grant preparation does NOT constitute a formal commitment for funding. We will still need to make various legal checks before grant award: *legal entity validation, financial capacity, exclusion check, etc*.

Grant preparation will involve a dialogue in order to fine-tune technical or financial aspects of the project and may require extra information from your side. It may also include adjustments to the proposal to address recommendations of the evaluation committee or other concerns. Full compliance will be a pre-condition for signing the grant.

If you believe that the evaluation procedure was flawed, you can submit a **complaint** (following the deadlines and procedures set out in the evaluation result letter). Please note that notifications which have not been opened within 10 days after sending will be considered to have been accessed and that deadlines will be counted from

opening/access *(see also Funding & Tenders Portal Terms and Conditions)*. Please also be aware that for complaints submitted electronically, there may be character limitations.

9. Award criteria

The **award criteria** for this call are as follows:

1. ***Relevance:*** *(10 points)*

   - clarity and consistency of project, objectives and planning; extent to which they match the themes and priorities, and objectives of the call in relation to the improvement of knowledge needed for scientific advice to fisheries management under the CFP; contribution to the EU strategic and legislative context, including, where relevant, to the objectives of CFP

   - identification of specific needs/challenges of the policy domains targeted in the call; European/trans-national dimension

   - extent to which the proposal differentiates from other initiatives in the field and provides added value; quality of proposed coordination and support measures; potential to develop mutual trust/cross-border cooperation

2. ***Quality:*** *(10 points)*

   - quality and effectiveness of the methodology for implementing the project (concept and methodology, management, procedures, timetable, risks and risk management, monitoring and evaluation);

   - feasibility of the project within the proposed time frame;

   - cost effectiveness (sufficient/appropriate budget for proper implementation; best value for money);

   - quality of the consortium (if applicable) and project teams; appropriate procedures and problem-solving mechanisms for cooperating within the project teams and consortium (if applicable);

3. ***Impact:*** *(10 points)*

   - extent to which the outputs of the project contribute to each of the expected impacts of the call/topic, credibility and feasibility of the proposed pathway for the uptake/integration of project results/data into the scientific advisory process; suitability and quality of the measures to maximise expected outcomes and impacts

   - appropriateness of the approach to stakeholder engagement (e.g. fishing industry etc.), appropriateness of the dissemination and exploitation plan, including communication activities and, if applicable, measures linked to intellectual property and knowledge protection and regulatory issues; sustainability of results after EU funding ends

   - ambition and expected long-term impact of results on target groups/general public

Award criteria	Minimum pass score	Maximum score
Relevance	6	10
Quality	6	10
Impact	6	10
Overall (pass) scores	**21**	**30**

Maximum points: 30 points.

Individual thresholds per criterion: 6/10, 6/10 and 6/10 points.

Overall threshold: 21 points.

Proposals that pass the individual thresholds AND the overall threshold will be considered for funding — within the limits of the available budget (i.e. up to the budget ceiling). Other proposals will be rejected.

10. Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements

If you pass evaluation, your project will be invited for grant preparation, where you will be asked to prepare the Grant Agreement together with the EU Project Officer.

This Grant Agreement will set the framework for your grant and its terms and conditions, in particular concerning deliverables, reporting and payments.

The Model Grant Agreement that will be used (and all other relevant templates and guidance documents) can be found on Portal Reference Documents.

Starting date and project duration

The project starting date and duration will be fixed in the Grant Agreement *(Data Sheet, point 1)*. Normally the starting date will be after grant signature. A retroactive starting date can be granted exceptionally for duly justified reasons — but never earlier than the proposal submission date.

Project duration: *see section 6 above*.

Milestones and deliverables

The milestones and deliverables for each project will be managed through the Portal Grant Management System and will be reflected in Annex 1 of the Grant Agreement.

The following deliverables will be mandatory for all projects:

- a policy brief at the end of each reporting period
- a project factsheet at the beginning of the project, including an update once the project is finished

Form of grant, funding rate and maximum grant amount

The grant parameters *(maximum grant amount, funding rate, total eligible costs, etc)* will be fixed in the Grant Agreement *(Data Sheet, point 3 and art 5)*.

Project budget (requested grant amount): *see section 6 above*.

The grant will be a budget-based mixed actual cost grant (actual costs, with unit cost and flat-rate elements). This means that it will reimburse ONLY certain types of costs (eligible costs) and costs that were *actually* incurred for your project (NOT the *budgeted* costs). For unit costs and flat-rates, you can charge the amounts calculated as explained in the Grant Agreement *(see art 6 and Annex 2 and 2a)*.

The costs will be reimbursed at the funding rate fixed in the Grant Agreement (**80%**).

Grants may NOT produce a profit (i.e. surplus of revenues + EU grant over costs). For-profit organisations must declare their revenues and, if there is a profit, we will deduct it from the final grant amount *(see art 22.3)*.

Moreover, please be aware that the final grant amount may be reduced in case of non-compliance with the Grant Agreement *(e.g. improper implementation, breach of obligations, etc)*.

Budget categories and cost eligibility rules

The budget categories and cost eligibility rules are fixed in the Grant Agreement *(Data Sheet, point 3 and art 6)*.

Budget categories for this call:

- A. Personnel costs
  - A.1 Employees, A.2 Natural persons under direct contract, A.3 Seconded persons
  - A.4 SME owners and natural person beneficiaries
- B. Subcontracting costs
- C. Purchase costs
  - C.1 Travel and subsistence
  - C.2 Equipment
  - C.3 Other goods, works and services
- D. Other cost categories
  - D.1 Financial support to third parties
- E. Indirect costs

Specific cost eligibility conditions for this call:

- personnel costs:
  - SME owner/natural person unit cost[26]: Yes
- travel and subsistence unit cost[27]: Yes[28]
- equipment costs: depreciation

[26] Commission Decision of 20 October 2020 authorising the use of unit costs for the personnel costs of the owners of small and medium-sized enterprises and beneficiaries that are natural persons not receiving a salary for the work carried out by themselves under an action or work programme (C(2020)7115).

[27] Commission Decision of 12 January 2021 authorising the use of unit costs for travel, accommodation and subsistence costs under an action or work programme under the 2021-2027 multi-annual financial framework (C(2021)35).

[28] See EU Grants AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement, art 6 on eligible costs: travel and subsistence costs must be declared using the unit cost according to Annex 2a of the grant agreement. If a particular instance of travel, accommodation or subsistence in the action is not covered by one of the unit costs mentioned in Decision C(2021)35 the actual costs may be used.

- other cost categories:
  - costs for financial support to third parties: not allowed
- indirect cost flat-rate: 7% of the eligible direct costs (categories A-D, except volunteers costs and exempted specific cost categories, if any)
- VAT: non-deductible/non-refundable VAT is eligible (but please note that since 2013 VAT paid by beneficiaries that are public bodies acting as public authority is NOT eligible)
- other:
  - in-kind contributions for free are allowed, but cost-neutral, i.e. they cannot be declared as cost
  - kick-off meeting: costs for kick-off meeting organised by the granting authority are eligible (travel costs for maximum 2 persons, return ticket to Brussels and accommodation for one night) only if the meeting takes place after the project starting date set out in the Grant Agreement; the starting date can be changed through an amendment, if needed
  - project websites: communication costs for presenting the project on the participants' websites or social media accounts are eligible; costs for *separate* project websites are not eligible
  - other ineligible costs: see article 6.3 of the Grant Agreement.

Reporting and payment arrangements

The reporting and payment arrangements are fixed in the Grant Agreement *(Data Sheet, point 4 and art 21 and 22)*.

After grant signature, you will normally receive a **prefinancing** to start working on the project (float of normally **40%** of the maximum grant amount; exceptionally less or no prefinancing). The prefinancing will be paid 30 days from entry into force/financial guarantee (if required) — whichever is the latest.

There will be one or more **interim payments** (with detailed cost reporting).

Payment of the balance: At the end of the project, we will calculate your final grant amount. If the total of earlier payments is higher than the final grant amount, we will ask you (your coordinator) to pay back the difference (recovery).

All payments will be made to the coordinator.

⚠ Please be aware that payments will be automatically lowered if you or one of your consortium members has outstanding debts towards the EU (granting authority or other EU bodies). Such debts will be offset by us — in line with the conditions set out in the Grant Agreement *(see art 22)*.

Please also note that you are responsible for **keeping records** on all the work done and the costs declared.

Prefinancing guarantees

If a prefinancing guarantee is required, it will be fixed in the Grant Agreement *(Data Sheet, point 4)*. The amount will be set during grant preparation and it will normally be equal or lower than the prefinancing for your grant.

The guarantee should be in euro and issued by an approved bank/financial institution established in an EU Member State. If you are established in a non-EU country and

would like to provide a guarantee from a bank/financial institution in your country, please contact us (this may be exceptionally accepted, if it offers equivalent security).

Amounts blocked in bank accounts will NOT be accepted as financial guarantees.

Prefinancing guarantees are normally requested from the coordinator, for the consortium. They must be provided during grant preparation, in time to make the prefinancing (scanned copy via Portal AND original by post).

If agreed with us, the bank guarantee may be replaced by a guarantee from a third party.

The guarantee will be released at the end of the grant, in accordance with the conditions laid down in the Grant Agreement *(art 23)*.

Certificates

Depending on the type of action, size of grant amount and type of beneficiaries, you may be requested to submit different certificates. The types, schedules and thresholds for each certificate are fixed in the Grant Agreement *(Data Sheet, point 4 and art 24)*.

Liability regime for recoveries

The liability regime for recoveries will be fixed in the Grant Agreement *(Data Sheet, point 4.4 and art 22).*

For beneficiaries, it is one of the following:

- limited joint and several liability with individual ceilings — *each beneficiary up* to their maximum grant amount
- unconditional joint and several liability — *each beneficiary up to the maximum grant amount for the action*

or

- individual financial responsibility — *each beneficiary only for their own debts*.

In addition, the granting authority may require joint and several liability of affiliated entities (with their beneficiary).

Provisions concerning the project implementation

Security rules: *see Model Grant Agreement (art 13 and Annex 5)*

Ethics rules: *see Model Grant Agreement (art 14 and Annex 5)*

IPR rules: *see Model Grant Agreement (art 16 and Annex 5):*

- rights of use on results: Yes

Communication, dissemination and visibility of funding: *see Model Grant Agreement (art 17 and Annex 5):*

- communication and dissemination plan: Yes
- additional communication and dissemination activities: Yes

Specific rules for carrying out the action: *see Model Grant Agreement (art 18 and*

Annex 5):

- specific rules for blending operations: No

Other specificities

n/a

Non-compliance and breach of contract

The Grant Agreement (chapter 5) provides for the measures we may take in case of breach of contract (and other non-compliance issues).

For more information, *see AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement*.

11. How to submit an application

All proposals must be submitted directly online via the Funding & Tenders Portal Electronic Submission System. Paper applications are NOT accepted.

Submission is a **2-step process**:

a) **create a user account and register your organisation**

To use the Submission System (the only way to apply), all participants need to create an EU Login user account.

Once you have an EULogin account, you can register your organisation in the Participant Register. When your registration is finalised, you will receive a 9-digit participant identification code (PIC).

b) **submit the proposal**

Access the Electronic Submission System via the Topic page in the Calls for proposals section (or, for calls sent by invitation to submit a proposal, through the link provided in the invitation letter).

Submit your proposal in 3 parts, as follows:

- Part A includes administrative information about the applicant organisations (future coordinator, beneficiaries, affiliated entities and associated partners) and the summarised budget for the proposal. Fill it in directly online
- Part B (description of the action) covers the technical content of the proposal. Download the mandatory word template from the Submission System, fill it in and upload it as a PDF file
- Annexes (*see section 5*). Upload them as PDF file (single or multiple depending on the slots). Excel upload is sometimes possible, depending on the file type.

The proposal must keep to the **page limits** *(see section 5)*; excess pages will be disregarded.

Documents must be uploaded to the **right category** in the Submission System, otherwise the proposal may be considered incomplete and thus inadmissible.

The proposal must be submitted **before the call deadline** (*see section 4*). After this deadline, the system is closed and proposals can no longer be submitted.

Once the proposal is submitted, you will receive a **confirmation e-mail** (with date and time of your application). If you do not receive this confirmation e-mail, it means your proposal has NOT been submitted. If you believe this is due to a fault in the Submission System, you should immediately file a complaint via the IT Helpdesk webform, explaining the circumstances and attaching a copy of the proposal (and, if possible, screenshots to show what happened).

Details on processes and procedures are described in the Online Manual. The Online Manual also contains the links to FAQs and detailed instructions regarding the Portal Electronic Exchange System.

12. Help

As far as possible, ***please try to find the answers you need yourself***, in this and the other documentation (we have limited resources for handling direct enquiries):

- Online Manual
- Topic Q&A on the Topic page (for call-specific questions in open calls; not applicable for actions by invitation)
- Portal FAQ (for general questions).

Please also consult the Topic page regularly, since we will use it to publish call updates. (For invitations, we will contact you directly in case of a call update).

Contact

For individual questions on the Portal Submission System, please contact the IT Helpdesk.

Non-IT related questions should be sent to the following email address: cinea-emfaf-calls@ec.europa.eu.

Please indicate clearly the reference of the call and topic to which your question relates *(see cover page)*.

13. Important

IMPORTANT

- **Don't wait until the end —** Complete your application sufficiently in advance of the deadline to avoid any last minute **technical problems**. Problems due to last minute submissions *(e.g. congestion, etc)* will be entirely at your risk. Call deadlines can NOT be extended.
- **Consult** the Portal Topic page regularly. We will use it to publish updates and additional information on the call (call and topic updates).
- **Funding & Tenders Portal Electronic Exchange System —** By submitting the application, all participants **accept** to use the electronic exchange system in accordance with the Portal Terms & Conditions.
- **Registration —** Before submitting the application, all beneficiaries, affiliated entities and associated partners must be registered in the Participant Register. The participant identification code (PIC) (one per participant) is mandatory for the Application Form.
- **Consortium roles—** When setting up your consortium, you should think of organisations that help you reach objectives and solve problems.

  The roles should be attributed according to the level of participation in the project. Main participants should participate as **beneficiaries** or **affiliated entities**; other entities can participate as associated partners, subcontractors, third parties giving in-kind contributions. **Associated partners** and third parties giving in-kind contributions should bear their own costs (they will not become formal recipients of EU funding). **Subcontracting** should normally constitute a limited part and must be performed by third parties (not by one of the beneficiaries/affiliated entities). Subcontracting going beyond 30% of the total eligible costs must be justified in the application.
- **Coordinator —** In multi-beneficiary grants, the beneficiaries participate as consortium (group of beneficiaries). They will have to choose a coordinator, who will take care of the project management and coordination and will represent the consortium towards the granting authority. In mono-beneficiary grants, the single beneficiary will automatically be coordinator.
- **Affiliated entities** — Applicants may participate with affiliated entities (i.e. entities linked to a beneficiary which participate in the action with similar rights and obligations as the beneficiaries, but do not sign the grant and therefore do not become beneficiaries themselves). They will get a part of the grant money and must therefore comply with all the call conditions and be validated (just like beneficiaries); but they do not count towards the minimum eligibility criteria for consortium composition (if any). If affiliated entities participate in your project, please do not forget to provide documents demonstrating their affiliation link to your organisation as part of your application.
- **Associated partners** — Applicants may participate with associated partners (i.e. partner organisations which participate in the action but without the right to get grant money). They participate without funding and therefore do not need to be validated.
- **Consortium agreement** — For practical and legal reasons it is recommended to set up internal arrangements that allow you to deal with exceptional or unforeseen circumstances (in all cases, even if not mandatory under the Grant Agreement). The consortium agreement also gives you the possibility to redistribute the grant money according to your own consortium-internal principles and parameters (for instance, one beneficiary can reattribute its grant money to another beneficiary). The consortium agreement thus allows you to customise the EU grant to the needs inside your consortium and can also help to protect you in case of disputes.

- **Balanced project budget —** Grant applications must ensure a balanced project budget and sufficient other resources to implement the project successfully *(e.g. own contributions, income generated by the action, financial contributions from third parties, etc)*. You may be requested to lower your estimated costs, if they are ineligible (including excessive).

- **Completed/ongoing projects —** Proposals for projects that have already been completed will be rejected; proposals for projects that have already started will be assessed on a case-by-case basis (in this case, no costs can be reimbursed for activities that took place before the project starting date/proposal submission).

- **No-profit rule —** Grants may NOT give a profit (i.e. surplus of revenues + EU grant over costs). This will be checked by us at the end of the project.

- **No cumulation of funding/no double funding —** It is strictly prohibited to cumulate funding from the EU budget (except under 'EU Synergies actions'). Outside such Synergies actions, any given action may receive only ONE grant from the EU budget and cost items may under NO circumstances be declared under two EU grants; projects must be designed as different actions, clearly delineated and separated for each grant (without overlaps).

- **Combination with EU operating grants —** Combination with EU operating grants is possible, if the project remains outside the operating grant work programme and you make sure that cost items are clearly separated in your accounting and NOT declared twice *(see AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement, art 6.2.E).*

- **Multiple proposals —** Applicants may submit more than one proposal for *different* projects under the same call (and be awarded funding for them).

  Organisations may participate in several proposals.

  BUT: if there are several proposals for *very similar* projects, only one application will be accepted and evaluated; the applicants will be asked to withdraw the others (or they will be rejected).

- **Resubmission —** Proposals may be changed and re-submitted until the deadline for submission.

- **Rejection —** By submitting the application, all applicants accept the call conditions set out in this this Call document (and the documents it refers to). Proposals that do not comply with all the call conditions will be rejected. This applies also to applicants: All applicants need to fulfil the criteria; if any one of them doesn't, they must be replaced or the entire proposal will be rejected.

- **Cancellation —** There may be circumstances which may require the cancellation of the call. In this case, you will be informed via a call or topic update. Please note that cancellations are without entitlement to compensation.

- **Language —** You can submit your proposal in any official EU language (project abstract/summary should however always be in English). For reasons of efficiency, we strongly advise you to use English for the entire application. If you need the call documentation in another official EU language, please submit a request within 10 days after call publication (for the contact information, *see section 12*).

- **Transparency —** In accordance with Article 38 of the EU Financial Regulation, information about EU grants awarded is published each year on the Europa website.

  This includes:

  - beneficiary names
  - beneficiary addresses
  - the purpose for which the grant was awarded
  - the maximum amount awarded.

  The publication can exceptionally be waived (on reasoned and duly substantiated request), if there is a risk that the disclosure could jeopardise your rights and freedoms under the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights or harm your commercial interests.

- **Data protection —** The submission of a proposal under this call involves the collection, use and processing of personal data. This data will be processed in accordance with the applicable legal framework. It will be processed solely for the purpose of evaluating your proposal, subsequent management of your grant and, if needed, programme monitoring, evaluation and communication. Details are explained in the Funding & Tenders Portal Privacy Statement.