

European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (2021-2027)

Fostering socio-economic growth and environmentally sustainable blue investment in Maltese Fisheries and Aquaculture

Eligibility Guidance Notes

Call 20 for Project Proposals

Specific Objective 1.6: Contributing to the protection and restoration of aquatic biodiversity and ecosystems

Type of Actions:

1. Actions targeted at the collection of lost fishing gears and the passive collection of marine litter from the sea in line with the Single Use Plastic Products Strategy for Malta 2021-2030 and in line with the Prioritised Action Framework (PAF) for Natura 2000 in Malta (2021-2027).



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1. Scope of the Eligibility Guidelines

The scope of these Eligibility Guidelines is to provide assistance to prospective Applicants when applying for projects part-financed by the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) Programme 2021-2027.

In Malta, the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund Programme falls under the responsibility of the Managing Authority (MA), the Funds and Programmes Division (FPD), within the Ministry responsible for the Economy, European Funds and Lands (MEFL).

Potential Applicants are encouraged to read through these Eligibility Guidelines and the relevant sections of the EMFAF Programme¹ as will be highlighted in the sections below, to avoid submitting ineligible applications.

Prospective Applicants are also encouraged to go through the Indicator Guidance Notes for better understanding of what is requested with regards to the indicators section.

2. Background information on the EMFAF 2021-2027 programming period

The EMFAF Programme provides the opportunity to Malta to support investment within its fisheries and aquaculture sectors. The EMFAF is expected to build upon the investments of previous programming period, thus aiming to maximise the added value of public investment. The below is a brief overview of the Programme:

The EU share is that of **€21,825,290** which when adding the national counterpart will add up to €31,178,987. The EMFAF is divided in between two priorities as explained below:

- 1. Priority 1: Fostering sustainable fisheries and the conservation of aquatic biological resources**
- 2. Priority 2: Fostering sustainable aquaculture activities and processing, and marketing of fisheries and aquaculture products**

Both priorities include within them different type of actions as outlined within the programme itself. All type of actions are linked to different specific objectives which ultimately contribute to the respective priority. Some actions which are planned under this programme include investments on-board fishing vessels, advisory services, training and diversification opportunities targeting support for professional fishers as well as improvement in designated fishing ports and landing infrastructure. Funding shall also help in enhanced data collection activities and investment in control and enforcement. Other actions included in the programme target the protection and restoration of aquatic biodiversity and ecosystems, together with research and innovation actions targeting the sustainability, resilience and competitiveness of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors. Additionally, awareness-raising campaigns shall focus on the promotion of sustainable fish consumption.

Both priorities mentioned above, include within them operations of strategic importance such as the conservation and restoration of marine Natura 2000 areas. Such measures and operations will seek an integrated approach towards management of relevant economic and environmental sectors, in collaboration with all relevant stakeholders.

¹ The document can be downloaded from:
<https://fondi.eu/programme/european-maritime-fisheries-and-aquaculture-fund/>

Under the second priority, another operation of strategic importance will be the research and development on domestication of aquaculture species to promote species diversification. In line with Malta's Multiannual National Plan for the Development of Sustainable Aquaculture 2022-2030, which aims to improve the sustainability and competitiveness of the sector, support will be given to research, innovation and investment in the introduction of new-culture species to decrease reliance in the limited national number of species currently available.

In addition to the above, the programme will support the provision of training to address the needs of fishers and sector-related employees. Support will also be given to interventions related to advisory services with the aim of improving the overall performance and competitiveness of operators and to promote sustainable fisheries. Main initiatives will include the promotion of the Fisheries and Aquaculture sectors, modernisation through support for new technology equipment as well as a strong focus on data collection and control, addressing marine litter, climate change and biodiversity impacts.

3. Context of the Call

This call under the EMFAF is an open call to project proposals to be submitted by:

- Public authorities/entities
- Local Councils;
- Fishers including small-coastal fishers, fishing cooperatives and associations;
- Non-Government Organisations (NGO's) involved in marine/fisheries/nature protection;
- Entities and research institutions involved with research/ studies/ assessments in the marine environment and similar.

The Applicant is to ensure that the proposal fits within the below Specific Objective and type of action:

Specific Objective 1.6 – Contributing to the protection and restoration of aquatic biodiversity and ecosystems.

Type of Actions:

1. Actions targeted at the collection of lost fishing gears and the passive collection of marine litter from the sea in line with the Single Use Plastic Products Strategy for Malta 2021-2030 and in line with the Prioritised Action Framework (PAF) for Natura 2000 in Malta (2021-2027).

Only proposals which can demonstrate their contribution to the above Specific objective are eligible to apply.

At project evaluation stage, the Project Selection Committee shall consult the State Aid Monitoring Board to obtain clearance regarding the involvement of state aid.

2. The Application Process

Applications should be submitted electronically on the Structural Funds Database available at sfd.gov.mt/application by not later than 14th September 2026 at noon.

Submission of an Application Form is considered as a formal statement by the applicant organisation that all the details in the application form are factually correct. It is also a confirmation that should the project be approved, the Applicant will carry out the project as described in the application form, including any amendments that maybe proposed by the Project Selection Committee during evaluation or by Managing Authority, in line with the conditions stipulated in the Grant Agreement, and the applicable procedures, rules and regulations applicable to the fund concerned.

3. Project Eligibility and Selection Criteria

Projects submitted will be evaluated by the Project Selection Committee according to the eligibility and selection criteria (refer to table below) which have been approved by the Monitoring Committee in line with Article 40 of the Common Provision Regulation (EU) 1060/2021. These criteria aim at ensuring that the projects are being selected within the Specific Objective parameters and can concretely contribute to the achievements of the objectives and results of the Programme. For a project to be considered for funding or to be placed on the reserve list, a project must pass all the Eligibility Criteria and must also obtain a minimum of 50% of the total marks allocated to the Selection Criteria. However, the project must achieve the threshold for each of the relevant selection criteria (*where applicable*) in order to be considered further, even if the total points achieved exceed 50%.

Moreover, the assessment will take into consideration the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union when applying criteria and procedures, as well as accessibility to persons with disabilities as per Articles 23 and 26 of the respective Charter, ensure gender equality as per Article 23, and take account of the principle of sustainable development and of the Union policy on the environment in accordance with Article 11 and Article 191(1) TFEU.

Table 1 below indicates the approved eligibility and selection criteria.

Eligibility criteria are the essential criteria that all projects must meet to be admissible for a further qualitative assessment. Such eligibility criteria are normally assessed through a technical assessment which ensures that all applications have reached a minimum standard. Projects which do not comply with the gateway eligibility criteria will not proceed to full appraisal and scoring.

Selection criteria are designed to assess the fit and contribution of project proposals with the Programme strategy, its target groups and its objectives. These criteria are divided in a way to capture both quantitative assessment and qualitative assessment. The evaluation will combine both data (quantitative and qualitative) to have a comprehensive understanding of the proposal.

Table 1: Project eligibility and selection criteria

Eligibility Criteria		Selection criteria		
<p>Eligibility criteria are the essential criteria that all projects must meet in order to be admissible for a further qualitative assessment. Projects which do not comply with the gateway eligibility criteria will NOT proceed to full appraisal and scoring.</p> <p>Note: no numerical markings are involved in this section. Fulfilment of such criteria takes the form of Yes or No. Eligible projects should fulfil all criteria listed below.</p>				
Criterion	Assessment	Criterion	Marks (max)	Sub-criteria
<p>Application Form</p> <p>Applicant must present an application form filled-in with relevant details² and auxiliary documentation. Timely submission prior to deadline defined in the call for applications.</p>	Yes/No	<p>The proposed project maximises the contribution to EU key priorities as expressed in the programme objectives and expected results</p>	20	<p>The assessment will include the following selection criteria, amongst others:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The project's ability to demonstrate the achievement of common objectives under the EU Habitats, Birds and the Marine Strategy Framework Directives, namely the achievement of Favourable Conservation Status and the protection of listed habitats and species. - The project's ability to, contribute to the protection and restoration of aquatic biodiversity and ecosystems and the achievement of Good Environmental Status (GES) in Malta's marine waters. - The extent the project involves actions related to the protection and restoration of marine ecosystems, contributing to the

² Relevant details are those required by the selection committee to evaluate the application and award points.

				<p>objectives of the EU Marine Action Plan, by seeking to address the passive collection of marine litter, with the possibility of also focusing on the prevention of entry of litter (including Abandoned, Lost or otherwise Discarded Fishing Gear, and Single Use Plastics) into the marine environment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The project's ability to ensure that the actions take into account the needs identified in Malta's draft <i>Conservation Objectives & Measures: For Malta's Marine Natura 2000 sites, Malta's Long Term Waste Management Plan 2021-2030, Malta's Single Use Plastic Strategy for 2021-2030</i> and the <i>MSFD Programme of Measures</i>.
<p>Capacity of beneficiary organisation</p> <p>Applicant must have adequate administrative capacity, competence and technical resources</p>	Yes/No	Contribution of the project to the programmes type of actions, interventions and Member State Obligations and commitments	20	<p>The assessment will include the following selection criteria, amongst others:</p> <p>Evidence that the project addresses qualitatively and quantitatively the programme objectives and support the recovery, resilience, green transition, and digitalisation.</p> <p>The extent that the project delivers on the type of actions and interventions described in the programme.</p> <p>The proposal's ability to demonstrate how its interventions will involve fishers in line with the</p>

				ambitions of the Single-Use Plastic Products Strategy for Malta 2021-2030, EU's Strategy for plastics in a circular economy and the Single-Use Plastics Directive (SUP) (EU) 2019/904.
				The project's ability to contribute to achieving the targets of the <i>Biodiversity Strategy 2030</i> through the effective measures addressed to reduce pollution.
				The project's ability to involve actions related to port or other infrastructure amenities for adequate lost fishing gear and marine litter reception, in line with applicable state aid rules and the Port Reception Facilities Directive (EU) 2019/883.
				The extent that the project is implemented through an inclusive approach involving various stakeholders (in addition to fishers and SSCF) in the participatory management of the marine space, as explained in the programme.
Eligibility of Beneficiary	Yes/No/NA	Potential of the project to enhance innovation and partnership in the sector	5	If partners are involved, evidence of how they will contribute to the achievement of the Expected Results
Applicant is not in an exclusion situation in accordance with Art 136(1) and Art 141(1) of 2018/1046 Financial Regulation and Art 73(2)(i) of CPR (if applicable)				The ability of the project to mobilise complementary funding/actions to achieve the Expected Results
				Innovative solutions proposed in this project to achieve the Expected Results

<p>Beneficiary in compliance with Common Fisheries Policy rules</p> <p>Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 2022/2181 defines time periods and dates for the inadmissibility of applications in case of infringements and points system. The criterion is applicable where the applicant concerned is an 'operator' as defined in Article 4(30) of Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013, thus a natural or legal person who operates or holds any undertaking carrying out any of the activities related to any stage of production, processing, marketing, distribution and retail chains of fisheries and aquaculture products <i>(if applicable)</i>³</p>	<p>Yes/No/NA</p>	<p>Contribution towards indicators beyond minimum</p>	<p>10</p>	<p>Assessed in terms of contribution towards the programme indicators beyond the minimum required</p> <p>Adequate description of the selected result indicators in the project proposal including an explanation of the method of quantification of targets and verification of their attainment.</p> <p>The relevant result indicator to be identified in the call for proposals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Actions contributing to good environmental status including nature restoration, conservation, protection of ecosystems, biodiversity, animal health and welfare <p>Assessment of whether there are any unrealistic project indicator targets which are not achievable</p> <p>The level of contribution of the proposed indicators towards achieving Programme targets as outlined in the call</p>
<p>Remit of beneficiary organisation</p> <p>Applicant organisation has remit to implement the project within its mandate⁴</p>	<p>Yes/No</p>	<p>Readiness</p>	<p>10</p>	<p>Risk associated with the timeline of the project as proposed by the Applicant</p> <p>Readiness, assessed based on policy-readiness, tenders, planning and environmental permits, recruitment procedures and, discussions amongst the relevant stakeholders, mandate, amongst others, depending on the nature of the published call and the nature of the proposal</p>

³ Not Applicable for Public Entities

⁴ NGOs and Voluntary Organisations are to submit relevant documentation which demonstrate the organisation's mandate and link to the subject of the call.

				Other risks
<p>Project implemented within the eligible territory and its direct benefit</p> <p>Reference goes to the Republic of Malta or for its direct benefit</p>	Yes/No	Project Sustainability and Cost-Effectiveness	10	<p>Magnitude of post operating costs against total project costs and how the benefits will continue to be enjoyed after the project financing has actually ended.</p> <p>The financial stability of the Applicant organisation if it is a private entity.</p> <p>The proposal includes a qualitative description on how the operations will respect the requirements on durability under Article 65(1) of the CPR.</p> <p>Extra marks given based on added value, project effectiveness and the justification of planned expenses. Co-financing necessitates obtaining the best return and added value possible on EU funds invested.</p>
<p>Verification of co-financing (where applicable)</p> <p>In cases where Government is not co-financing the project from national funds, the entity committing itself to provide co-financing (public or other organisations) must produce proof that resources for the whole duration of project are available.⁵</p>	Yes/No	Horizontal principles - Fundamental rights, Equal opportunities, non-discrimination, and accessibility	5	<p>Effective measures addressing Fundamental rights and compliance with the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union</p> <p>Effective measures addressing gender equality, including the role of women in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors</p> <p>Effective measures addressing equal opportunities for all</p> <p>Effective measures ensuring the principle of non-discrimination</p> <p>Effective measures ensuring accessibility</p>
<p>Proposal demonstrates the</p>	Yes/No		10	Effective measures that contribute towards

⁵ Proof needs to be supported by financial documents, bank statements and/or audited accounts signed by the entity's financial controller. Such declaration should be dated not more than 3 months prior to the opening of the call.

<p>contribution to a specific objective in line with Article 14 (1)(f) of the EMFAF Regulation (EU) No. 2021/1139</p> <p>Contributing to the achievement of Programme objectives and targets is essential</p>		Sustainable Development		<p>economic development of the fisheries and/or the aquaculture sector</p> <p>Effective measures that contribute towards responsible fisheries and aquaculture practices and social cohesion of the Small-Scale Fishers</p> <p>The proposal's ability to demonstrate that it is compatible with requirements under European and National legislation, including an adequate description of effective measures to achieve environmental sustainability within the framework of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD).</p>
<p>Project Leader from beneficiary organisation</p> <p>Such officer carries monetary and legal responsibility for implementing a project on behalf of the beneficiary. The persons' direct association with the beneficiary is crucial especially with a view to ensure that the grant is exclusively used for the agreed purpose</p>	Yes/No	Quality of application form	5	<p>General presentation and overall coherence between different sections of the proposal</p> <p>Proposed budget is in line with the proposed activities, demonstrating sound financial management and the absence of 'Double Funding'</p>
<p>Status of operation</p> <p>Status of operation is either ongoing or not yet started, unless otherwise allowed by the Regulation (EU)2021/1060 Article 63 (6)</p>	Yes/No			<p>Adequate description and purpose of each activity being proposed including a work plan/Gantt chart with regards to the implementation of these activities</p> <p>Proposal identifies communication strategies/actions showing how the use of public funds will be effectively publicised and communicated with the relevant target groups of the proposed project and the general public</p>

<p>Compliance with Article 11 of the EMFAF Regulation (EU) No. 2021/1139</p> <p>The application form must be in line with applicable criteria identified under Article 11 of the EMFAF Regulation (EU) No. 2021/1139 (if applicable)⁶</p>	<p>Yes/No/NA</p>
<p>Compliance with Article 13 of the EMFAF Regulation (EU) No. 2021/1139</p> <p>The operation/proposal does not fall under Article 13 of the EMFAF Regulation (EU) No. 2021/1139</p>	<p>Yes/No</p>
<p>Compliance with Article 25 of the EMFAF Regulation (EU) No. 2021/1139</p> <p>The operation/proposal must be in line with Article 25 of the EMFAF Regulation (EU) No. 2021/1139⁷ (if applicable)</p>	<p>Yes/No/NA</p>

<p>Complementarity</p>	<p>5</p>	<p>Proposal identifies complementarity with actions and results of other EU-funded projects, including under relevant Horizon Europe calls and its Mission Ocean.</p>
		<p>The extent that the project complements other national initiatives undertaken, such as the Lost Gear Response Initiative, and any research project areas related to, for example, marine restoration, fisheries sustainability (eliminating by-catch/improving selectivity) and marine governance.</p>

⁶ Not Applicable for Priority 1, S.O. 1.6

⁷ Applicable for Biodiversity and Ecosystems related calls.

4. Evaluation and Assessment

Further to the eligibility and selection criteria as listed above, the assessment and selection of projects shall be undertaken by a Project Selection Committee. This call is envisaged to be a restricted call, issued to the Environment and Resources Authority, within the Ministry for Environment, Energy and Enterprise.

Applications will be assessed against the Eligibility and Selection Criteria by the Project Selection Committee and will proceed to be assessed against the Selection Criteria only if the application meets all the requirements of the Eligibility Criteria.

A project must achieve 50% of the marks to be considered for funding. However, the project must achieve the threshold for each of the relevant criteria in order to be considered further, even if the total points achieved exceed 50%.

The voting members shall decide how the project proposal addresses each of the below criteria and assign marking points according to the following guide:

- Excellent 81 to 100% of points
- Very good 76 to 80% of points
- Satisfactory 50 to 75% of points
- Very poor 26 to 49% of points
- Unacceptable 1 to 25% of points.

5. Support

Further information and generic queries on this call and on the European Maritime Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund may be obtained from <https://fondi.eu/> or from FPD's email for Calls for Proposals 2021-2027: info.eufunds@gov.mt.