



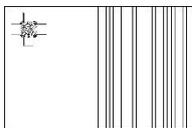
PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARIAT
FOR EUROPEAN FUNDS

ANNEX – CITIZEN’S SUMMARY

ANNUAL IMPLEMENTATION REPORT 2020

EUROPEAN MARITIME AND FISHERIES FUND (EMFF) 2014-2020

31ST MAY 2021
FUNDS AND PROGRAMMES DIVISION
OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER
MALTA



Maritime and Fisheries Operational Programme 2014-2020
Part-financed by the European Union
European Maritime and Fisheries Fund
Co-financing rate: 75% EU funds; 25% national funds

Investing in sustainable fisheries and aquaculture



1. Introduction

The European Maritime and Fisheries Fund Operational Programme (EMFF OP) for the 2014-2020 programming period, formally adopted on 3rd March 2015 and as amended in October 2017 (version 3.2), December 2018 (version 4.1) and November 2019 (version 5.0), is based on the following Union Priorities (UPs) and Specific Objectives:

UP1: Promoting environmentally sustainable, resource-efficient, innovative, competitive and knowledge-based fisheries.

- Specific Objective 1 – Reduction of the impact of fisheries on the marine environment, including the avoidance and reduction, as far as possible, of unwanted catches (public eligible allocation: €200,000 EMFF share 75%);
- Specific Objective 4 – Enhancement of the competitiveness and viability of fisheries and enterprises, including of small-scale coastal fleet, and the improvement of safety and working conditions (public eligible allocation: €10,730,572 EMFF share 75%);
- Specific Objective 5 – Provision of support to strengthen technological development and innovation, including increasing energy efficiency, and knowledge transfer (public eligible allocation: €146,666 of which €106,667 EMFF share 75% and €40,000 EMFF share 50%);
- Specific Objective 6 – Development of professional training, new professional skills and lifelong learning (public eligible allocation: €500,000 EMFF share 75%).

UP2: Fostering environmentally sustainable, resource-efficient, innovative, and competitive and knowledge-based aquaculture.

- Specific Objective 1 – Provision of support to strengthen technological development, innovation and knowledge transfer (public eligible allocation: €571,196 EMFF share 75%).
- Specific Objective 2 – Enhancement of the competitiveness and viability of aquaculture enterprises, including improvement of safety or working conditions, in particular of SME's (public eligible allocation: €200,000 EMFF share 75%);
- Specific Objective 3 – Protection and restoration of aquatic biodiversity and the enhancement of ecosystems related to aquaculture and the promotion of resource-efficient aquaculture (public eligible allocation: €2,321,548 EMFF share 75%).

UP3: Fostering the implementation of the Common Fisheries Policy

- Specific Objective 1 – Improvement and supply of scientific knowledge as well as the improvement of the collection and management of data (public eligible allocation: €4,426,910 EMFF share 80%);
- Specific Objective 2 – Provision of support to monitoring, control and enforcement, thereby enhancing institutional capacity and the efficiency of public administration, without increasing the administrative burden (public eligible allocation: €5,814,088 EMFF share 88.58%).

UP5: Fostering marketing and processing

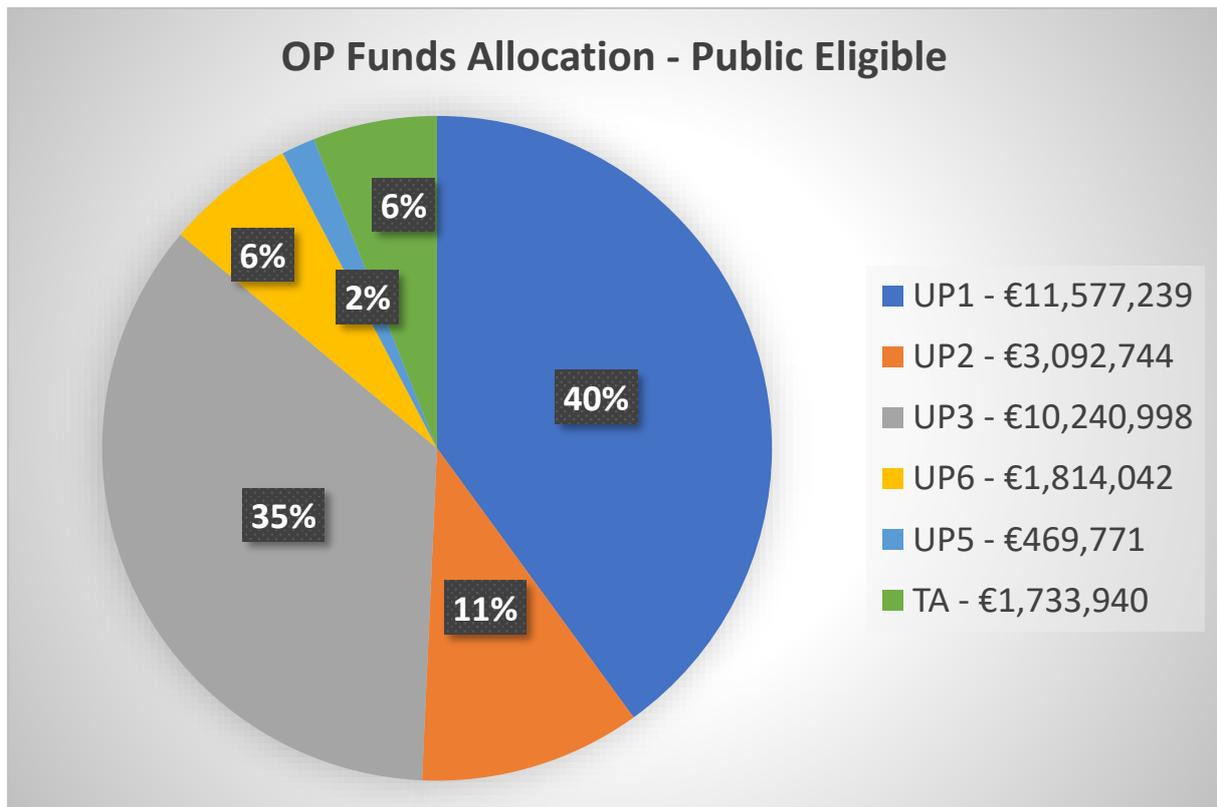
- Specific Objective 1 – Improvement of market organisation for fishery and aquaculture products (public eligible allocation: €469,771 of which €219,771 EMFF share 100% and €250,000 EMFF share 75%).

UP6: Fostering the implementation of the Integrated Maritime Policy

- Specific Objective 1 – Development and implementation of the Integrated Maritime Policy (public eligible allocation: €1,814,042 EMFF share 75%).

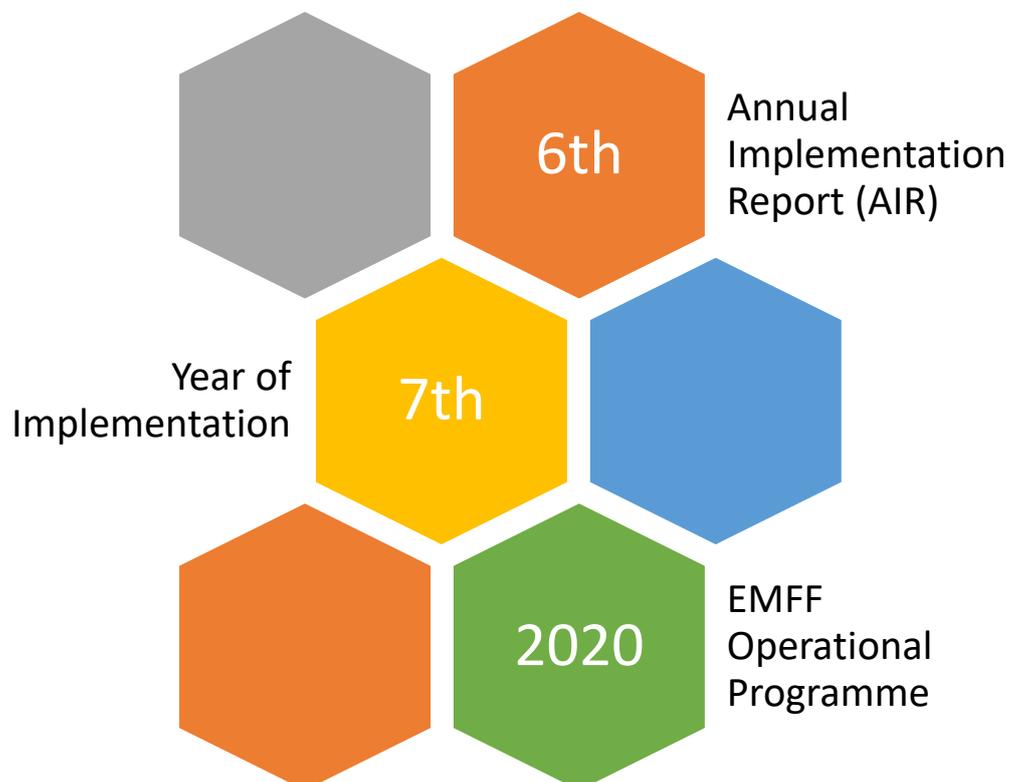
Technical Assistance (TA)

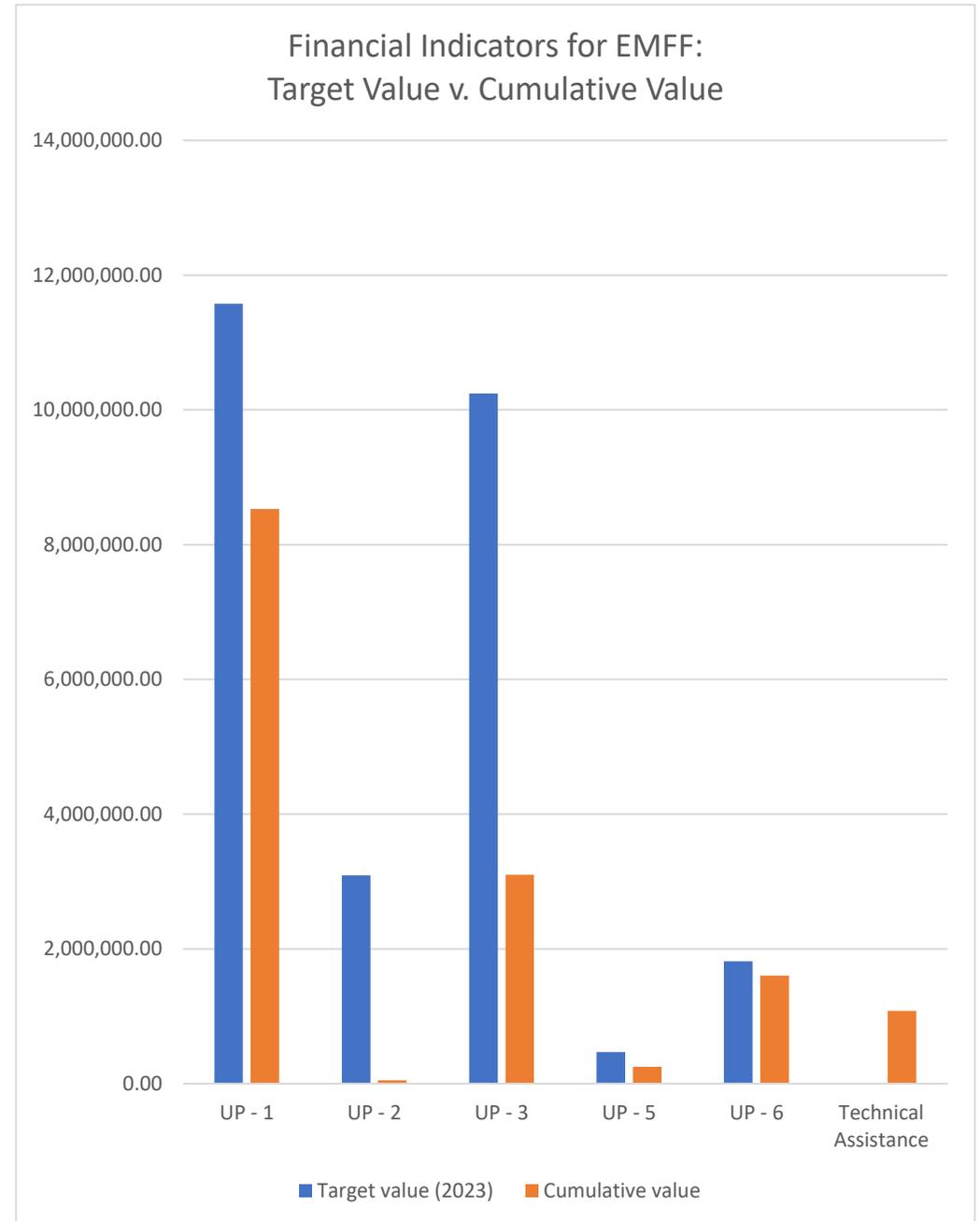
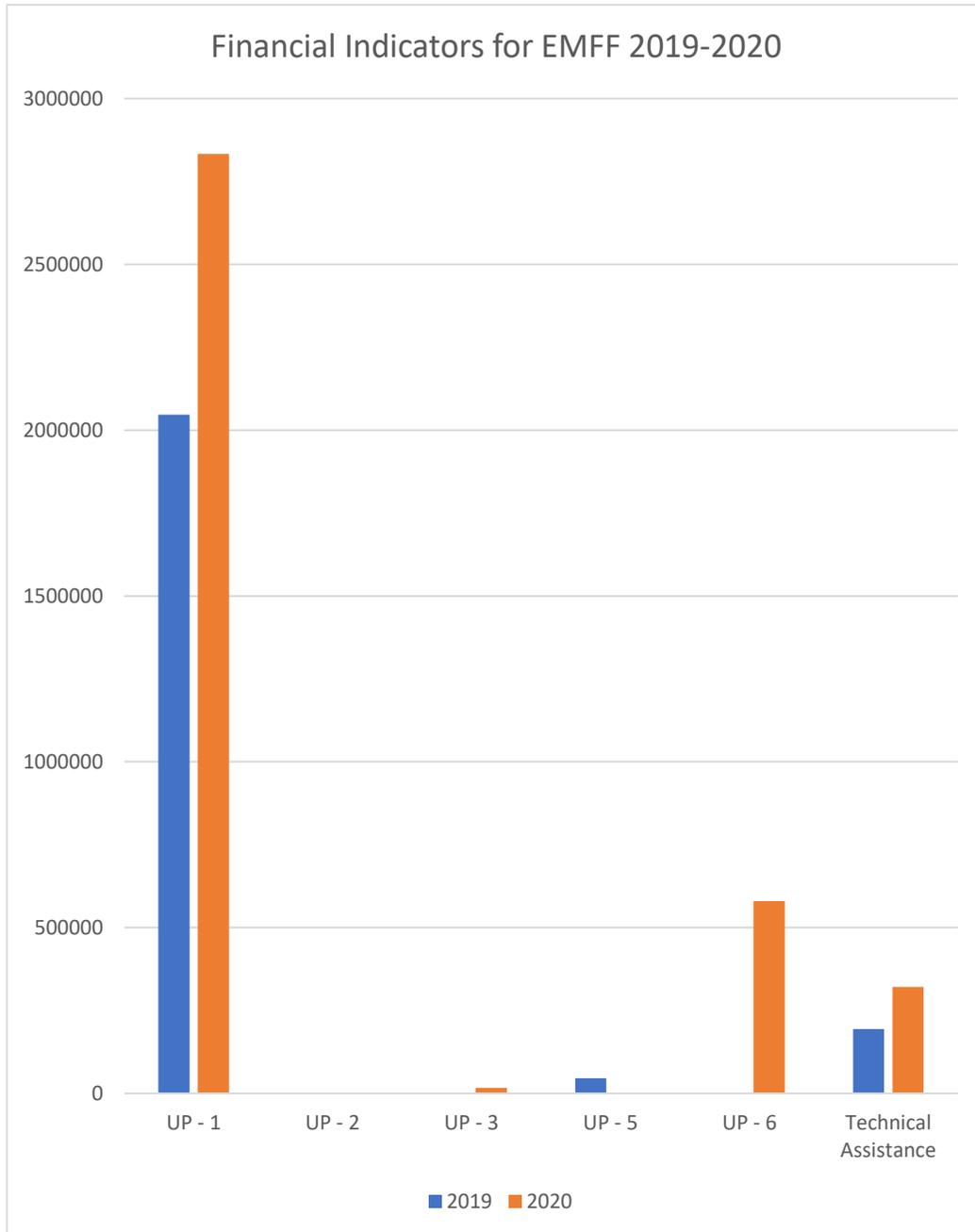
- Public eligible allocation: €1,733,940 EMFF share 75%.



2. Overview of the Implementation of the EMFF Operational Programme 2020

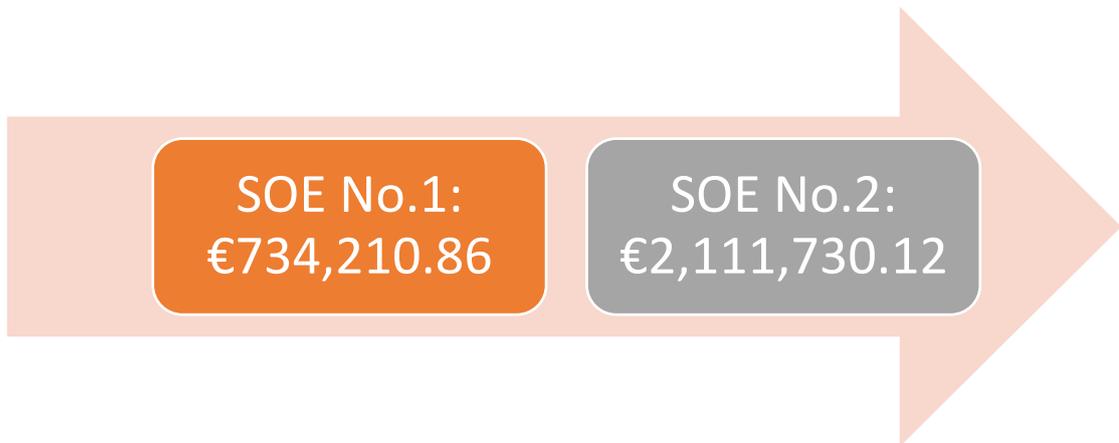
The Managing Authority (MA) is hereby presenting:





Whilst year 2019 turned out to be a significant milestone for Malta in its implementation of the EMFF OP, with efforts concentrated on the achievement of the extended implementation period (N +3), Performance Framework targets and on the issuance of calls, work in the year 2020 was dedicated to the continued effective monitoring of operations awarded in previous years. By the end of 2020, a total of 35 operations had been selected for EU co-financing. Additionally, three open calls were issued throughout the year.

Two National Refund Claims also known as Statements of Expenditure (SOEs) to the European Commission (EC) by Fund were completed in 2020, one of which was finalised by end of accounting year on 30 June. The claim for payment, which amounted to €734,210.86 (EMFF share), was submitted to the EC on 29th October 2020. The claim for payment of the other SOE, which was completed for accounting year ending 23rd December 2020, amounted to a total of €2,111,730.12 (EMFF share).



Calls issued in 2020

UP2

Article 47
Innovation
(Aquaculture)

UP3

Article 76
Control and
enforcement

Article 47
Innovation
(aquaculture)

- Total Public eligible: €800,000
- 2 Open Calls issued

Article 76
Control and
Enforcement

- Total Public eligible: €2,000,000
- Restricted Call issued to the *Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture*

3. Calls launched during 2020 and progress made towards Milestone Indicators

(i) Union Priority 1:

Adopted EMFF OP Measure	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Operation code and title.
Article 29 – Promotion of human capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• EMFF 1.4.1: Training for Fishers.
Article 39 – Innovation linked to conservation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• EMFF 1.16.1: A scientific study to improve trawl gear selectivity.
Article 41.1 – Energy efficiency and mitigation of climate change	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• EMFF 1.20.1: Article 41.1 – On board investments (Grande Madre – MLT000000620);• EMFF 1.20.2: Article 41.1 – On board investments (Marion I – MLT00MFA7276);• EMFF 1.20.3: Article 41.1 – On board investments (Madre Teresa – MLT00MFA0154);• EMFF 1.20.4: Article 41.1 - On board Investments (St. Peter - MLT00MFA0140).
Article 43.1 – Fishing ports, landing sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• EMFF 1.23.1: The Construction and finishing of an office on the fish landing site in the Marsaxlokk designated port;• EMFF 1.23.2: The refurbishment and upgrading of slipways in the port of Marsaxlokk;• EMFF 1.23.3: The construction of a breakwater at Qrejten point in the port of Marsaxlokk;• EMFF 1.23.5: Upgrading of the fisheries infrastructure of Gozo;• EMFF 1.23.6: Upgrading of Mġarr Gozo and Marsaxlokk Malta fishing ports.

Ongoing operations and progress made toward milestones:

EMFF 1.23.3: Construction of a breakwater at Qrejten point in the port of Marsaxlokk

Physical works on the new 110m breakwater at Qrejten point had reached a very advanced stage by end of year 2020. 6000 tonnes of reinforced concrete and additional local hardstone were fully in place whilst utility and safety equipment were installed. Documentary On-The-Spot checks were carried out by MA representatives as well as a third-party contractor. An implementation extension was granted until 30th April 2021 on account of delays due to inclement weather during winter 2019-2020.



Photo: DOI - Clodagh O'Neill



Photo: DOI - Clodagh O'Neill

Photos above: Progression of works at middle-late stages.

EMFF 1.23.5: Upgrading of the fisheries infrastructure of Gozo

An implementation extension was granted until 30th June 2021 due to unforeseen supply delays (primarily Covid-19 related) in relation to the biggest project component involving the purchasing of five amphibious boat trailers and a towing vehicle for use in major designated port of Mġarr. This important area is the host of another project component as well, focusing on the installation of utility services in full complementarity with another co-financed project under the aegis of Infrastructure Malta. Meanwhile, infrastructural works at the smaller designated port of Xlendi were completed and inaugurated in June 2020. The area is now much more organised and safer for the respective operators conducting landings and routine maintenance.

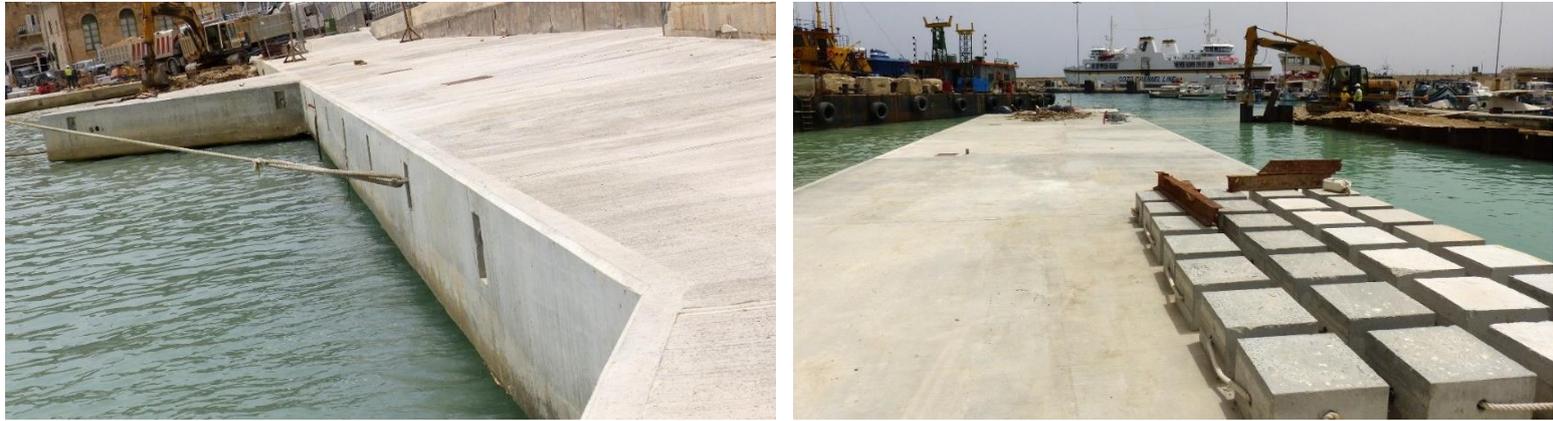


Photo - MGOZ - Terry Camilleri

Photos above: Inauguration of Xlendi project component in June 2020.

EMFF 1.23.6: *Upgrading of Mġarr Gozo and Marsaxlokk Malta fishing ports*

By end of 2020, the physical aspect of the project had reached an advanced stage – concrete and dredging works were being finalised so as to enable the installation of new pontoons in 2021. An implementation extension was granted until 30th April 2021 on account of delays due to inclement weather during winter 2019-2020.



Photos above: Progression of works during different project stages.

EMFF 1.4.1: *Training for fishers*

The first batch of courses were completed in 2018, and the certificates were disseminated on the 26th July 2018. The second batch of courses were expected to be completed in 2020, however this was negatively affected by Covid-19 pandemic. The project was extended until March 2021. In line with the recommendations and directives issued by the Maltese Health Authorities, the contractor responsible suspended the delivery of the remaining training sessions. The MA was informed that the sessions could not be conducted remotely since they required the use of specialized equipment. The certificate-giving ceremony was also cancelled. Over 400 participants benefitted from this project. The courses were aimed at improving the knowledge and skills of local fishers, thus the overall standard of the local fishing industry

EMFF 1.9.1: *Temporary cessation of fishing activities*

The first scheme was launched in December 2019, and 26 applications were accepted during the selection process. The second temporary cessation scheme was launched in November 2020. 43 applications were submitted, out of which 28 were accepted. 15 applications were declared ineligible due to some fishers not having enough SWO or swordfish landings, others went out fishing in December (this being the month for temporary cessation), another fisher withdrew his application, whilst another was considered as ineligible due to an infringement. Applicants who applied had to refrain from fishing for the month of December 2020. The Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture (DFA) reviews the applicants' eligibility and selection criteria which take into consideration requirements set out in Article 33 and Article 10 of Regulation (EU) No. 508/2014.

Completed operations and progress made toward milestones:

EMFF 1.16.1: A scientific study to improve trawl gear selectivity

This was completed in 2019 as per the end date stipulated in the Grant Agreement. Final payments were processed by quarter 1 and documentary On-The-Spot checks were conducted by the MA. A Project Closure Report was submitted by the Beneficiary. A total of €193,061.29 in public eligible costs were processed out of the €200,000 allocated under this operation.

Other completed operations include **EMFF 1.20.1**, **EMFF 1.20.2** and **EMFF 1.20.3**, which fall under Article 41.1. These were concluded in year 2018 and payments were certified by the end of the same year. In 2019, the MA, together with a third-party engineer, conducted physical On-The-Spot checks on board the related fishing vessels in order to ascertain that all line items listed in the Grant Agreement were in fact purchased, installed and operational. A Project Closure Report was submitted by the Beneficiaries in view of the result indicator referring to a change in net profits. This was provided in year 2020, and essentially involved verifications by the MA that the pertinent result indicator (change in Net profits) was reached, basing on 2019 financial figures provided by the beneficiaries through a private accountant. All operations reached the result indicator which had been identified in their respective Grant Agreement. The below numbers confirm the positive business impact left by Union co-financing:

- **EMFF 1.20.1: Investments on board vessel MFA 620 Grande Madre.** The Grant Agreement target for completion for operation was set at €700 whilst Net profits for 2019 were €4,933.44;
- **EMFF 1.20.2: Investments on board vessel MFA 7276 Marjon I.** The Grant Agreement target for completion for operation was set at €850 whilst Net profits for 2019 were €1,098;
- **EMFF 1.20.3: Investments on board vessel MFA 154 Madre Teresa.** The Grant Agreement target for completion of operation was set at €6,800 whilst Net profits for 2019 were €12,666 higher than those for the preceding year.

Operation **EMFF 1.20.4**, which also falls under Article 41.1, was concluded in year 2020. In 2021, the MA shall conduct a physical On-The-Spot check on board the related fishing vessel in order to ascertain that all line items listed in the Grant Agreement were in fact purchased, installed and operational. A closure report is to be prepared in year 2022, following registration of 2021 financials by the beneficiary through an accountant of his trust.

EMFF 1.23.1: The construction and finishing of an office on the fish landing site in the Marsaxlokk designated port

The Marsaxlokk landing office was inaugurated in September 2020. A closure report was submitted by the DFA. The target for result indicator 1.8, this being ‘FTE Employment maintained’, was set at 1116 FTE at Grant Agreement stage. The Beneficiary informed the MA that the DFA can only confirm whether this result indicator has been achieved in year 2022, as data is published on an N+2 basis. Therefore, the data for 2020 will be collected in 2021, and published in 2022. Yet, the DFA also stated that the result indicator is unlikely to be achieved as there was a decrease of 522 FTEs between 2014 and 2020. The operation reached its numerous objectives.

By procuring a moveable crane, landing operations in the area became safer and more efficient. The landing office enables DFA officials to perform their duties in a well enclosed, weather protected environment resulting in a more effective service, hence raising the overall standard of the designated port of Marsaxlokk. Moreover, local fishers will be provided with a better service and overall work experience. Through the completion of the project and the placement of a permanent staff member in the office, the DFA was able to achieve a Simplification Measure SM.35/2020 entitled:

‘Isir konsolidament tas-servizzi offruti fil-qasam tas-Sajd. Is-servizzi kollha lill-klijent ser jibdeu jingħataw minn post wiehed. Għal dan il-għan ser jinfeθu żewġ uffiċini wieħed fit-Tramuntana u l-ieħor fin-Nofsinhar ta’ Malta. B’hekk jiġi evitat kull skariġġ għas-sajjeda.’

Therefore, this office enabled the DFA to extend the provision of its services into the community.



Photos above: Inauguration event in September 2020.

EMFF 1.23.2: Refurbishment and upgrading of slipways in the port of Marsaxlokk

This operation was completed by end September 2019. Ten slipways, which shall aid the fishers in their logistical works, were upgraded. A total of €539,130.69 in public eligible costs were processed by the end of 2019.



Photo above: An example of finalised works on one slipway.

(ii) Union Priority 2:

Calls launched in 2020 and evaluation of project applications:

In year 2020 two open calls for project proposals were issued under Article 47 – Innovation of Regulation (EU) No. 508/2014. Under the first open call, one application was submitted by AquaBioTech Ltd. The proposal was found non-admissible by the Project Selection Committee (PSC), since the applicant failed to submit the required documentation by the stipulated deadline.

As a result, another open call was issued under the same measure in June 2020, with a budget of €800,000. Two project proposals were received, one by AquaBioTech Ltd. and another by the DFA. Whilst both project proposals were found eligible by the PSC, and both complied with the objectives of the Fund and the admissibility and selection criteria established for the call, only one application could be co-financed due to limited funds available under the Measure. In this regard, the MA issued a grant award letter to AquaBioTech Ltd. since it ranked first out of the two applicants. The total amount of public eligible funds paid by end 2020 amounted to €1,440,769.26 under UP 2.

Ongoing operations and progress made toward milestones:

EMFF 2.1.1: *Development of new, innovative aquaculture technologies and facilitate knowledge transfer in AquaBioTech Group*, Beneficiary: *AquaBioTech Group*.

The main goal of the project is to create a physical space from where the beneficiary organisation would be able to implement research and innovation activities through a structured cooperation platform involving students from Malta's higher education system, as the next generation of aquaculture experts. This Centre will host a state-of-the-art training facility and conference room, various laboratories as well as offices to carry out fish health diagnostics and aquaculture services presently absent on the island. The proposed infrastructure will enable the beneficiary to develop new vaccine and feed testing methods which will be used in the recently developed Recirculation Aquaculture Systems (RAS) facility of the Company. New vaccines and feeds will reduce the impact on the environment, reducing dependence on fish meal and oil fostering a more sustainable use of resources in aquaculture.

EMFF 2.2.1: *Productive Aquaculture Investments at Pisciculture Marine de Malte Ltd.* Beneficiary: *Pisciculture Marine de Malte Ltd.*

An extension to the Grant Agreement’s validity until 30th June 2021 was agreed upon in order to cater for the last two line items within the project, namely the tailor-made manufacturing and installation of cabins on existing aquaculture work boats and the procurement of a new work boat. The latter was inserted in the project as a new component upon a justified request which emphasised the dynamic clientele-based necessities of the concerned aquaculture firm especially in terms of productivity and safety measures. The new work boat was built in a Greek shipyard and arrived in Malta during quarter 4 of 2020. Although five reimbursement claims were processed, covering a substantial portion of the overall project grant, not all the transactions listed in the new work boat contract were settled by end of year. Documentary checks by the MA confirmed the lawfulness of all claims.



Photo: Arrival of the new aquaculture boat from Greece.

EMFF 2.3.1: Productive Investments in non-food aquaculture using RAS in AquaBioTech Group.
Beneficiary: AquaBioTech Group.

The difficult Covid-19 situation in Malta, featuring a partial lock-down and several precautionary measures such as remote working encouraged by Government, affected the progress of management verifications on this project. Physical On-The-Spot checks could not be easily executed given the biologically sensitive nature of the research centre. Diligent preparation for claiming the reimbursement of staff costs not falling under the Simplified Cost Option mechanisms was undertaken by the Beneficiary. From its part, the MA agreed to extend the Grant Agreement validity until 30th June 2021 owing to the encountered *force majeure*.

EMFF 2.3.2: Increasing productivity, efficiency and sustainability of Blue-fin tuna fish farming operations

In line with previous reporting, the MA suspended payments in accordance with Article 132(2) (b) of the Common Provisions Regulations, referring to projects’ suspension in case of an ongoing investigation. In fact, the MA, through official correspondence sent from the office of the State Advocate, terminated the project accordingly.

Notwithstanding the complete removal of the MFF Ltd operation, the target indicator related is still being achieved.

By the end of 2020, a total amount of €1,590,202.59 in public eligible funds were paid under this UP, out of the total allocation of €3,092,781 stipulated in the EMFF OP.



(iii) Union Priority 3

Calls launched in 2020 and evaluation of project applications:

A restricted call for project proposals was issued under UP 3, on the basis of Article 76 – Control and Enforcement. The DFA, being the competent body under UP3, was invited to submit a project proposal with a maximum total public eligible amount of €2,000,000. The MA issued the call in March 2020. The DFA submitted an application form by the closing date of the call, being 8th May, due to an extension provided as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the project proposal was immediately withdrawn by the applicant. Since the application form was withdrawn, its evaluation by the PSC did not proceed.

The project proposal which was submitted by the DFA in year 2018 entitled ‘*The supply, delivery, installation and commissioning of a CCTV Network System around Malta and Gozo including a control centre for the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture*’, submitted under Article 76 – Control and Enforcement, was also withdrawn by the applicant. This was because the legislative framework required to install such system around the island could not be finalised by the end of 2020. The applicant informed the PSC and the MA that there is still a need for such project and therefore the DFA will continue with the finalisation of the legislative framework, hoping that such project proposal can be implemented during the next programming period. In this regard, the PSC accepted the withdrawal of the application and halted its evaluation process.

Ongoing operations and progress made toward milestones:

During 2020, the implementation of **EMFF 6.2.2: Data Collection Multi-Annual Programme 2017-2019**, which falls under Article 77 – *Data Collection*, was at advanced stages of implementation. An extension to the operation until July 2021 was requested by the Beneficiary due to the re-issuance of a new tender (since no bids were received at the first time) and due to extension requests submitted by suppliers as a result of COVID-19. Such extension request was approved by the Managing Authority. Throughout 2020, management verifications were conducted and financial corrections, as well as recommendations, were made accordingly.

EMFF 6.2.3: Data Collection Multi-Annual Programme 2020-2021. By the end of Quarter 1 of 2020, the PSC completed the evaluation of the data collection operation for years 2020-2021, which entails a continuation of the previous data collection multiannual programme. The MA issued a grant award letter and the implementation initiated by the beneficiary, this being the DFA. The Grant Agreement was signed in September 2020 and the implementation was initiated, with 25 claims inputted in the EMFF Database system.

The nine operations which fall under Article 76 – Control and enforcement, also progressed during 2020. The end date of operations **EMFF 6.1.1 (c)** and **EMFF 6.1.1 (e)** was extended until March 2021 due to public procurement issues related to the purchase of five hand-pallet trucks. The tender for the procurement of this equipment was launched three times, and in all instances the tender had to be cancelled due to non-compliance. Reviewing the technical specifications and re-launching a public call for tenders was time consuming. Once this activity is implemented and a closure report is submitted by the Beneficiary, result indicators will be verified by the MA.

The other seven operations were also under implementation in 2020. Whilst several components and line items were completed by the second half of the year, other activities are still under implementation.

- **EMFF 6.1.2 (a): *The purchase, installation and development of technology.*** Actions undertaken in 2020 included the implementation of CCTVs and ALWs, and the closure of logbooks.
- **EMFF 6.1.2 (b): *The development, purchase and installation of the components to ensure data transmission.*** This operation is under implementation; The DFA issued a tender for the Procurement of Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) and The Provision of Satellite Transmissions. Such tender is not yet awarded.
- **EMFF 6.1.2 (f): *The purchase of other control means.*** The aerial drones were purchased and are being used by the Beneficiary, this being the DFA. This operation is still under implementation since the engine certification tender is to be issued in year 2021.

- **EMFF 6.1.2 (h): *Training and exchange programmes.*** This operation was completed in year 2020. Travel invoices were reimbursed and inputted in the EMFF Database system.
- **EMFF 6.1.2 (i): *2 Cost Benefit Analysis and 3 Audits to assess the performance and expenditure incurred by the DFA to carry out monitoring, control and surveillance.*** This operation is under implementation, with analysis and audits currently being undertaken.
- **EMFF 6.1.2 (j): *Seminars and media tools.*** The media campaign was awarded in August 2020. Television and radio adverts pertaining to such campaign started to be broadcasted in November 2020. This operation was also affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. In fact, only two seminars were held in 2020, whilst five other seminars had to be re-scheduled.



Photo: Introduction to one of the seminars.

Completed operations and progress made toward milestones:

EMFF 6.1.2 (k): *Operational Costs.* This operation was completed in 2020.

As a consequence of the shortcomings detected by Commission officials in the control system of Malta over Bluefin Tuna (BFT) farms and related activities carried out in the territory and waters under the jurisdiction of Malta or by vessels flying the flag of Malta, the EC opened an infringement procedure against Malta. This led to the application of Article 100 of the EMFF Regulation, effectively blocking payment requests for control and enforcement under UP3 Specific Objective 2. In order to safeguard the financial interests of the Union, as well as national funds, no payments related to the Control operations were processed by the Beneficiary in the EMFF database and no funds were certified to the EC by the Managing Authority in year 2020. This stance will remain until the infringement is lifted, or until the Commission effectively communicates to the MA a change in the prevailing situation. If and when the infringement is lifted, a claim for reimbursement of the costs incurred during programme implementation will then be considered.

EMFF 6.2.1: *Data Collection Framework Multiannual Programme 2014-2016* was completed by end 2018, as already reported in the previous AIR 2019. Further management verifications were conducted in year 2020. Such verifications are envisaged to be completed by Quarter 2 of 2021.

The total amount of public eligible funds paid by end 2019 stood at €5,060,852.80 under UP 3, out of the total allocation of €10,240,998 stipulated in the EMFF OP.

(iv) Union Priority 5:

Completed operations and progress made toward milestones:

As reported in the previous AIR 2019, operation **EMFF 4.3.1: *Nesploraw Flimkien it-Teżori tal-Bahar!*** was fully implemented by end December 2018. Throughout 2019, the MA concluded its management verifications on the operation. Financial, output and result indicators set for this UP were met. By end December 2019, a total amount of €249,957.71 in public eligible costs were processed. All payments were certified and claimed to the EC by the end of the year.

(v) Union Priority 6:

Ongoing operations and progress made toward milestones:

EMFF 8.3.1: *Marine environmental monitoring: towards effective management of Malta’s marine waters.*

As in previous years, contact was maintained between the MA and the beneficiary, this being the Environment and Resources Authority (ERA). Regular monitoring was held whereby the state-of-play of implementation and issues necessitating follow-up were discussed. Progress reports, reporting for January – June and July – December 2020 were compiled in line with the Grant Agreement. Due to unprecedented delays related to drafting of tenders and procurement, ERA requested an extension to the Grant Agreement in order to strike a balance between the duration of the tender (in order to ensure good quality deliverables) and the timelines of the project. Such tenders relate to the monitoring of marine mammals and marine reptiles in Maltese waters and to the establishment of a strategy for the long-term monitoring of seabirds in Malta. Such monitoring is in line with the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (2008/56/EC). The extension was accepted by the Managing Authority.

The total amount of public eligible funds paid, as well as certified, by end 2020 stood at €1,600,000 under this Union Priority, out of the total allocation of €1,814,042 stipulated in the EMFF OP.

(vi) Technical Assistance:

As in previous years, during 2020 TA funds were used mainly to support the implementation of the EMFF OP. In 2020, a total of €329,445.69 worth of payment claims (public eligible) were processed by the MA relating to various operations under this UP, namely in relation to the following:

- EMFF 7.1.1: *Implementation of the Operational Programme;*
- EMFF 7.1.2: *IT Systems;*
- EMFF 7.1.3: *Improving administrative capacity;*
- EMFF 7.1.4: *Communication Activities;*
- EMFF 7.1.5: *Evaluation;*
- EMFF 7.1.9: *Other.*

TA expenditure was mainly related to salaries, promotional activities and material (for future distribution to fishers and stakeholders), logistical expenses of meetings organised by the MA throughout the year and other IT related payment claims. Apart from the above-mentioned activities, TA was also utilised to cover advertising costs incurred for the publishing of various adverts in local newspapers and in the local Government Gazette in order to promote the calls launched during 2020.

Notwithstanding the limitations imposed by the pandemic, the EMFF MA adapted its methods of outreach to ensure that the regulatory obligations are met, nevertheless. In accordance with its Communication Strategy for the 2014-2020 programming period, the Managing Authority embarks on an annual event to reach the general public and disseminate the opportunities provided by and achievements of the Fund. For year 2020, TA funds were utilised to advertise the EMFF on the exterior of fourteen route vehicles (twelve in Malta and two in Gozo) for a span of six weeks. Bus advertising featuring visibility tackling co-financed projects was chosen in view of

the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 situation in terms of interpersonal contact whilst ensuring the key EMFF visuals could be seen around Malta and Gozo. By the end of 2020, a total of €1,100,450.91 in public eligible funds were disbursed under this Union Priority out of the total TA allocation of €1,733,940.

4. Evaluation Activities

During quarters 1 and 2 of 2020, the MA compiled its fifth EMFF AIR in accordance with regulations and the dedicated template. The fifth EMFF AIR was sent through a written procedure, whereby the Report for the year 2019 was already adopted by the Monitoring Committee (MC) via written procedure in May 2020. Meanwhile, the MC meeting was held on the 20th November 2020, despite it being planned for May, when it was postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The MC was held virtually and an update on the implementation of the OP was provided to Committee members.

Throughout the reporting year, Project Progress Reports covering ongoing operations were submitted by the beneficiaries on a template prepared by the MA. Assistance with the filling-in of the said template was provided when needed. Bilateral and generic meetings were also held with the aim of clearly determining with stakeholders the status of operations, the basis for informed decision-making.

5. Information and Publicity

The MA's online website was regularly updated throughout the year in order to meet the regulatory requirements, such as the list of selected operations as laid down in Article 119 of Regulation (EU) No. 508/2014. The MA ensured that the webpage included the necessary information and documentation such as regulations, publications, reports, supporting documentation and other documents pertaining to upcoming calls.

Information sessions and/or meetings were held accordingly. Open calls were promoted in the Government Gazette and on all Sunday newspapers, where applicable, with the aim of ensuring wide coverage. Advertising costs were covered through TA.

Open calls and success stories were also promoted on the Funds and Programmes Division's complementary website <http://www.eufundsmalta.gov.mt/> which can also be accessed through *Maltapps*, a mobile application enabling the public to access information on government services, including EMFF funding, on mobile devices anywhere 24 hours a day.

In accordance with its communication strategy for the 2014-2020 programming period, the MA embarks on an annual event in order to reach the general public and disseminate the opportunities provided by and achievements of the Fund. For the year 2020, due to the Covid-19 and the Health Directives, the MA decided to issue a campaign through bus wrap advertising featuring visibility tackling co-financed projects.

