Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership

CALL FOR EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST 2026

NORTH SEA REGIONAL PORTFOLIO OF PROJECTS

EXPLORING NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS TO ADDRESS CUMULATIVE IMPACTS ON MARINE ECOSYSTEMS WHILE SUPPORTING MARITIME SEA USES

SUSTAINABLE BLUE ECONOMY PARTNERSHIP 2026

- *Call launch: September 9th 2026, 15H00 CEST (Brussels time)*
- *Submission form: **link***
- *Submission deadline: December 9th 2026, 15H00 CET (Brussels time)*

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2026 Call for Expressions of Interest – North Sea Regional Portfolio of projects

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1.0 CONTEXT AND OBJECTIVE OF THE CALL FOR EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST

1.1 The Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership

The Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership (SBEP, hereafter 'the Partnership') is a Research and Innovation (R&I) Partnership started in 2022 under the Horizon Europe Program, and is part of the Pilar II of Cluster 6 (Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment). It brings together 74 partner institutions from 32 countries and the European Commission to pool research and innovation investments and align national programmes at pan-European scale.

The vision of the Partnership, defined in the Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda[1] is to:

- *Design, steer and support a just and inclusive transition to a regenerative, resilient, and sustainable blue economy.*
- *Boost the transformation needed towards a climate-neutral, sustainable, productive, and competitive blue economy by 2030.*
- *Create, enhance and sustain ocean health and the social, environmental and economic well-being of the people by 2050.*

The Partnership activities, including the Regional Portfolios of projects, originate from the Partnership's Intervention Areas 2026:

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

- *Cross cutting enablers covered in the four Intervention Areas: Use and application of digitalisation, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Digital Twins (DT), inclusion of Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) perspectives, implementation of Nature-based Solutions (NbS).*

In line with EC ambitions, the Partnership aims to strengthen the European blue economy by aligning research and innovation priorities at national, regional and European level. The Partnership contributes in implementing EC objectives, such as those set out in the recent EU

[1] Benjamin Kürten, Margherita Cappelletto, Margherita Zorgno, Giorgio Carpino, Anne Magnussøn, Jon Flæten, Marianne Areng (2024) Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership – Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda 2024.DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14243414

Ocean Pact (and upcoming Ocean Act proposal), as well as key political strategies, i.e. the European Green Deal, OceanEye and the Zero Pollution vision for 2050.

In addition to its core activity – the launching of annual transnational joint calls co-funded by the partner institutions and the European Commission – the Partnership creates networking platforms to facilitate R&I knowledge-sharing and cooperation, both at thematic and regional levels[2]. The Regional Portfolio Action is part of these additional activities and follows-up on the Partnership regional cooperation activities.

This call for expression of interest addresses the **North Sea Regional Portfolio**. It is to be noted that participation in multiple Regional Portfolios is addressed in the eligibility criteria (see section 5.2). The other Regional Portfolio calls for expression of interest are available on the Partnership website (see timeline presented in section 6.0).

1.2 The Regional Portfolio Action

The Regional Portfolios of projects is a networking action aiming to connect on-going R&I projects addressing the same EU sea-basin, either co-funded by the Partnership or by another national, regional, or EU instrument for a two-year period, from early 2027 to early 2029.

The Regional Portfolio Action was conceived as part of the Partnership's continued engagement in each EU sea-basin (Mediterranean Sea, Baltic Sea, North Sea, Black Sea), and the Atlantic Ocean. This engagement is coordinated through a network of sea-basin nodes who convey the sea-basin R&I priorities and needs, and bridge the regional and the Partnership levels, including in dialogue with sea-basin initiatives, conventions and strategies. The Regional Portfolios operate at the project level by bringing together ongoing projects funded through different funding streams but addressing common sea-basin R&I priorities. They aim to foster networking, knowledge exchange and synergies between projects while increasing the visibility of R&I activities within each sea basin.

The Regional Portfolio Action was designed with the Partnership's sea-basin nodes, partners active in the region, and external regional experts, gathered in Regional Portfolio Boards, which act as the decision-making body of the Action throughout its implementation. The portfolio design and implementation are also supported by the portfolio Facilitator (from the Secretariat or Regional Portfolio Board), whose expertise in the Portfolio topic and knowledge of brokerage activities in the sea-basin will help strengthen collaboration and coordination among the participating projects.

Five regional portfolios of projects will be running in the same timeframe, corresponding to the EU sea-basins (Mediterranean Sea, Baltic Sea, North Sea, Black Sea) and the Atlantic Ocean.

[2] More information about the Partnership portfolio activities can be found here: Thematic Portfolios [2026-2028] | Bluepartnership

One Call for expression of interest is launched per Regional Portfolio, in two waves:

- *1st wave of calls for expression of interest, July 29th 2026: Atlantic Ocean and Black Sea (deadline for applications: October 28th 2026)*
- *2nd wave of calls for expression of interest, September 9th 2026: Baltic Sea, North Sea and Mediterranean Sea (deadline for applications: December 9th 2026)*

The Regional Portfolios of projects are designed to foster networking between R&I projects in the same sea-basin, to address cooperation needs and challenges at a regional level. The Regional Portfolios topics are:

- *Atlantic Ocean Regional Portfolio: Addressing Atlantic Ocean coastal resilience in practice;*
- *Black Sea Regional Portfolio: Addressing knowledge gaps in the Black Sea: Information, data exchange and good practices in the context of climate change;*
- *Mediterranean Sea Regional Portfolio: Fostering inclusive governance and multi-use coastal and maritime infrastructure for sustainable development in the Mediterranean Sea;*
- *Baltic Sea Regional Portfolio: Improving the Baltic Sea Resilience: Resilience to large-scale events, infrastructure resilience, ecosystem resilience;*
- *North Sea Regional Portfolio: Exploring nature-based solutions to address cumulative impacts on marine ecosystems while supporting maritime sea uses.*

The Regional Portfolios of projects aim to strengthen communication between projects by fostering networking and knowledge sharing, leading to the co-creation and development of joint outputs and outcomes. They will maximise the collective impact of participating projects by improving coordination, increasing efficiency, and promoting collaborations and synergies. Each portfolio will develop a roadmap that may include joint activities to avoid duplication, build on complementary expertise, facilitate the exchange of knowledge and results, strengthen the long-term legacy of project outcomes, and co-develop innovative solutions that contribute to a sustainable blue economy in the EU.

With support from the Partnership, the Regional Portfolios are expected to enhance cooperation and synergies at regional and sea-basin scales, foster collaboration among quadruple helix stakeholders, and address the challenges and opportunities identified within each topic.

By participating in a Regional Portfolio, projects can benefit from:

- *increased visibility at the regional, European, and international level*
- *networking opportunities with regional stakeholders across the quadruple-helix*

- *professional development opportunities, particularly for early career scientists*
- *identification of new opportunities for cooperation*
- *identification of potential beneficiaries of the project outputs*
- *co-design of market-uptake and exploitation plans*
- *engagement with EU Commission experts*
- *participation to Partnership events*

Beyond the direct benefits to participating projects, the Regional Portfolios offer a framework for developing joint initiatives and creating collective impact to support the objectives of the Partnership Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda. They provide opportunities to co-develop policy recommendations, joint research outputs, and future collaborative activities, while strengthening engagement with key regional and European stakeholders. Through Regional Portfolios, collaboration with initiatives such as the Mission Ocean Lighthouses, regional conventions and organisations, and relevant European Commission services can be reinforced to support the uptake and long-term impact of project results.

The Partnership supports and contributes to the vision and ambitions of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Sustainable Development Goals, primarily to SDG 14 (Life Below Water), and to the challenges of the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development 2021-2030 (Ocean Decade). As a Decade Implementing Partner[3], the Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership offers through the Regional Portfolios an opportunity to connect at global level, to benefit from increased collaboration opportunities and stimulate wider knowledge-sharing across disciplines, geographies and generations. Coordinated by the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC of UNESCO), the Ocean Decade is calling for transformative ocean science and fosters sustainable ocean planning and management. To that effect, it provides a convening framework for scientists and stakeholders from diverse sectors to co-design and co-deliver the scientific knowledge and the partnerships needed to accelerate ocean science and advance ocean solutions.

2.0 REGIONAL PORTFOLIO TOPIC

The North Sea Regional Portfolio entitled "**Exploring nature-based solutions to address cumulative impacts on marine ecosystems while supporting maritime sea uses"** aims to bring together ongoing R&I projects addressing the restoration, sustainable management and resilience of North Sea marine and coastal ecosystems, while supporting the sustainable coexistence of fisheries, offshore activities and other maritime uses.

[3] More information can be found at: Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership - Ocean Decade.

Rather than focusing on a single topic, the North Sea Regional Portfolio is structured around a set of complementary thematic areas reflecting the interconnected challenges of ecosystem restoration, climate resilience, sustainable fisheries, coexistence of maritime activities, digitalisation, cumulative impact assessment and governance. This integrated approach will strengthen collaboration between research projects and support the transfer, demonstration and scaling-up of innovative solutions across the North Sea (i.e. Technology Readiness Level 6 projects and above).

To support the development of the North Sea Regional Portfolio, the following sub-themes are intended to help interested projects identify where their work aligns with the portfolio topic and where opportunities for collaboration, knowledge exchange, and added impact may emerge.

Projects expressing interest to participate to the North Sea Regional Portfolio must fit the scope of at least one of the sub-thematic areas of the portfolio topic, as described hereafter.

2.1 Nature-based Solutions for Ecosystem Restoration and Climate Resilience

This theme targets activities that contribute to the restoration and conservation of marine and coastal ecosystems while strengthening biodiversity, ecosystem services and climate resilience. Particular emphasis is placed on NbS, nature-inclusive approaches as tools to address cumulative environmental pressures and support climate adaptation and mitigation.

Projects should contribute to improving understanding of the ecological effectiveness, scalability and long-term sustainability of restoration approaches, including their potential benefits for fisheries, offshore activities and coastal communities.

Activities covered in the sub-thematic area:

- *NbS for marine and coastal ecosystem restoration*
- *Conservation and restoration of benthic habitats and reefs*
- *Seagrass meadow and other blue carbon ecosystem restoration*
- *Biodiversity conservation and habitat enhancement*
- *Nature-inclusive design of offshore infrastructure*
- *Ecological connectivity and habitat enhancement around offshore installations*
- *Blue carbon and ecosystem-based climate mitigation*
- *Climate adaptation and resilience of marine ecosystems*
- *Assessment of ecosystem recovery and ecological effectiveness*
- *Ecosystem services and natural capital assessment*
- *Restoration demonstration sites, pilot projects and upscaling approaches*
- *Monitoring and evaluation of NbS*
- *Adaptive restoration and long-term ecosystem management*
- *Integration of NbS into Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP)*
- *Financing mechanisms and innovative business models supporting ecosystem restoration*

2.2 Ecosystem-Based Coexistence of Fisheries, Offshore Sectors and a regenerative Blue Economy

This theme focuses on developing ecosystem-based approaches that enable the sustainable coexistence of fisheries, offshore renewable energy, maritime transport, aquaculture, conservation and other marine activities. Projects should explore synergies and trade-offs between sectors and develop solutions that strengthen ecosystem resilience while maintaining sustainable economic activities and supporting coastal communities.

Particular attention is given to ecosystem-based fisheries management, low-impact and selective fishing technologies, regenerative aquaculture, nature-inclusive offshore activities and innovative approaches to multifunctional marine spaces. Projects should contribute to Adaptive Marine Spatial Planning[4] by integrating ecological, socio-economic and climate considerations into decision-making.

Activities covered in the sub-thematic area:

- *Ecosystem-based fisheries management*
- *Sustainable and selective fishing technologies*
- *Low-impact and regenerative fishing practices*
- *Fish habitat restoration and enhancement*
- *NbS supporting fisheries and stock recovery*
- *Regenerative and low-impact aquaculture*
- *Integrated and multifunctional aquaculture approaches*
- *Synergies between fisheries, offshore renewable energy and conservation*
- *Coexistence between fisheries and offshore wind and other offshore sectors*
- *Sustainable maritime transport and nature-inclusive approaches*
- *Nature-positive offshore infrastructure and multi-use marine spaces*
- *Ecosystem-based MSP*
- *Assessment of trade-offs and synergies between marine sectors*
- *Socio-economic transition pathways for sustainable fisheries and offshore activities*
- *Innovative business models supporting a nature-positive blue bioeconomy*
- *Living Labs and demonstration sites for multi-use marine spaces*
- *Participatory approaches involving fishers, offshore industries, authorities, scientists and coastal communities*

[4] Adaptive Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) is an ongoing public process that analyzes, allocates, and regularly updates where and when human uses happen in the ocean to protect nature and balance competing industries. It is promoted globally by organizations like IOC UNESCO to manage shared waters safely.

2.3 Digital Monitoring, Decision Support and Cumulative Impact Assessment

The activities in this theme address the digitalisation, monitoring and decision-support capabilities required to understand and manage cumulative pressures on North Sea ecosystems. Research should combine ecological, socio-economic and climate information to support evidence-based and adaptive management across national boundaries.

Particular emphasis is placed on Artificial Intelligence, Digital Twins, autonomous observation systems, Earth observation and interoperable environmental data platforms. Projects should contribute to the development of harmonised indicators, predictive models and scenario-based tools capable of assessing cumulative impacts and supporting restoration, fisheries management, Marine Spatial Planning and offshore infrastructure planning.

Activities covered in the sub-thematic area:

- *Monitoring and observation applications for satellite and Earth observation, autonomous sensors, and real-time monitoring*
- *Digital modeling for AI and Machine Learning (ML) applications, Digital twins (e.g. applied to marine and coastal ecosystems), predictive modelling and scenario analysis*
- *Data uses and interoperable platforms (such as data sharing platforms like EMODnet), Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and Spatial Data, and cross-border collaboration*
- *Decision support systems and stakeholder engagement tools to conduct cumulative impact assessments, create harmonised indicators, as well as visualisation/ communication tools*
- *Early warning and forecasting systems*

2.4 Cross-Cutting Priorities

Across all three sub-thematic areas, projects participating in the North Sea Regional Portfolio are encouraged to address, where relevant, the following cross-cutting priorities:

- *Integrated marine spatial planning and coastal management, linking land and sea while integrating environmental, economic and societal considerations.*
- *Sustainable multi-use and nature-inclusive development, promoting synergies between maritime activities, climate resilience, ecosystem protection and Nature-based Solutions.*
- *Digitalisation, innovation and decision support, using digital tools to improve spatial planning, infrastructure management and stakeholder engagement.*
- *Inclusive governance and societal resilience: stakeholder engagement, co-creation, participatory governance, coastal community resilience and a just transition of blue economy sectors.*

- *Transboundary cooperation and policy uptake: coordinated Regional Sea management, knowledge transfer, scalability and contribution to EU and regional marine, biodiversity and climate policies.*

3.0 REGIONAL PORTFOLIO COMPOSITION

The Regional Portfolio will be composed of on-going projects co-funded by the Partnership (from Joint Transnational Calls 2023, 2024) and 2025 (open call) along with other on-going projects funded by other national, regional, or EU schemes that responds to this Call for Expressions of Interest. Chairs will be appointed for each Regional Portfolio.

Each Portfolio is composed of a **maximum of 15 projects**.

3.1 Project Representatives

The selected projects will be represented by a Project Representative (either the consortium Principal Investigator (PI) or an appointed consortium member) and will be required to participate in the Regional Portfolio activities. One additional representative or alternate i.e. another consortium member, can be proposed at the submission step for participation in the Regional Portfolio Activities (see 5.2). The participation of young researchers in the Portfolio is encouraged. The Project Representative, and appointed alternate (if any), will act as the main representative(s) of the project on the Portfolio.

The Regional Portfolio representatives are responsible for the following:

- *Active participation in the Regional Portfolio activities including attendance at meetings (2 in-person meetings in total, and online meetings every two months)*
- *Implementation of the agreed implementation plan during the two years of activities.*
- *Lead the dissemination and promotion of Regional Portfolio outputs.*
- *Support the Secretariat to draft the final Action report.*

3.2 Regional Portfolio Chairs

A Chair will be appointed for the Regional Portfolio, and elected among the Portfolio Project Representatives (PI or consortium member) or alternates (see 4.2) during the Portfolio kick-off meeting. The nomination of the Regional Portfolio Chair will be confirmed by the Regional Portfolio Board (see 1.2). Candidacy for this role will be on a voluntary basis.

Role of the Chair:

- *Support the Secretariat in the coordination of the Regional Portfolio activities (preparing the meetings, coordination of certain activities).*
- *Represent the Regional Portfolio projects in all dialogue with the Regional Portfolio Board.*
- *Lead the work in developing the Regional Portfolio's implementation plan/roadmap.*
- *Lead the work in defining and developing the Regional Portfolio expected outcomes and outputs.*
- *Lead the work in developing the final follow up of the Regional Portfolio Action implementation plan/roadmap.*
- *Support the Secretariat in drafting the final report that describes all joint activities and Action outcomes.*

4.0 DURATION, ACTIVITIES AND CONSTITUTION OF THE REGIONAL PORTFOLIO

4.1 Regional Portfolio duration

The duration of the Portfolio activities is set at two years (from early 2027 to early 2029) to foster collaboration and knowledge exchange among participating projects, support effective coordination, and enable the delivery of joint activities and outcomes.

4.2 Portfolio meetings

The Portfolio kick-off meeting will (if feasible) be organised in person, back-to-back with a regional event in the North Sea sea-basin, in the first quarter of 2027. Expected attendees include Portfolio Projects' Representatives, the Portfolio Secretariat and Board, and any interested Partnership Members (as observers).

The objectives of this inaugural meeting are to:

- *Introduce the participating projects, exchange and networking.*
- *Initiate the co-development/co-creation of the Portfolio activities. Nominate a Regional Portfolio Chair.*

The initial year will focus on building relationships, establishing trust, and fostering collaboration among participating projects. During this phase, the Secretariat, Facilitator (see 1.2) and Chair will work together with participating projects to develop an implementation plan and roadmap of activities. The implementation plan will include, (at a minimum):

- *The main objectives of the Regional Portfolio activities.*
- *A road map/timeline of activities to reach the objectives.*
- *The key expected outcomes and overall impact.*
- *A dissemination and exploitation plan, including communication activities.*

Thereafter, activities will be implemented in line with the agreed timeline, with regular (every two months) online meetings and other collaborative exchanges supporting ongoing engagement among participating projects.

A final in-person meeting will be organised to showcase the Portfolio's achievements, share lessons learned, and promote knowledge transfer to stakeholders from the Partnership and beyond.

At the conclusion of the Portfolio activities, a final report will be prepared summarising the collaborative activities, key outcomes, findings, and recommendations. The report will be submitted to the Portfolio Board for review and subsequently distributed widely to targeted stakeholders, including representatives from various European Commission Directorates-General (DGs), national authorities, and regional bodies.

No dedicated funding is associated with participation in the Portfolio. Subject to available resources, the Partnership may provide partial support for travel and accommodation expenses upon request. Interested projects should therefore be prepared to contribute to the costs associated with their participation in Portfolio activities.

4.3 Networking and other activities

A key objective of the Portfolio activities is to foster **networking, knowledge exchange and collaboration** among participating projects. Building on these interests, expertise, and opportunities identified by the Portfolio members, the Portfolio will develop a roadmap of activities, with the support of the Secretariat. The Portfolio activities will be fully integrated in the framework of the Partnership's objectives and implementation modalities..

Examples of activities that may be undertaken through the Portfolio include:

- *Mutual presentations: Sharing project roadmaps to establish a clear understanding of individual and collective goals.*
- *Communities of practice: Building networks to share methodologies, tools, and expertise.*
- *Data sharing and collaboration (in accordance with FAIR data principles and relevant EU data governance frameworks, including GDPR requirements where applicable): Developing and managing common databases for comparative analyses and synthesis; creating standards for data formatting and interoperability; Comparing results to identify key drivers of efficiency or best practices.*

- *Comparative analyses and syntheses: Conducting comparative analyses of results obtained by multiple projects to identify trends, commonalities, and differences; Drafting a cross-project synthesis for policymakers and stakeholders.*
- *Joint outputs: writing collaborative scientific papers, protocols, and strategies that combine results from multiple projects, to achieve shared goals; developing standardised protocols for future experiments.*
- *Knowledge transfer to industry: Co-organising workshops or demonstrations to present innovations to industry stakeholders; Identifying and developing market-applicable solutions based on research findings.*
- *Policy dialogues and recommendations: Hosting roundtables involving researchers, policymakers, and industry representatives to discuss project results and their implications; Drafting joint policy recommendations to influence regional, national, or European strategies.*
- *Communication and dissemination: Creating an online platform to disseminate project results, events, and developments to a wider audience; Developing a joint communication campaign on social media and other channels to increase the Portfolios' visibility. To this aim, support to communication and dissemination activities will be provided by the Secretariat and the Partnership.*
- *Training and awareness: Organising training workshops for young researchers or stakeholders on methodologies developed in the projects; Producing educational content (videos, infographics, guides) to popularise project results for the general public.*

These activities are intended to foster collaboration, maximise synergies among projects, enhance their collective impact, and accelerate the uptake and application of knowledge generated through participating projects.

Where relevant, connections with the other Regional Portfolios and the Partnership initiatives will be facilitated by the Portfolio Secretariat to encourage further exchange, collaboration, and impact.

4.4 Confidentiality and absence of conflict of interest

A Code of Conduct related to Conflict of Interests, confidentiality and non-disclosure will apply to the Projects' Representatives. This Code of Conduct will have to be approved and manually signed, and returned to the Portfolio Secretariat. Projects' representatives are required to demonstrate ethical conduct and respect the confidentiality of all information and documents as part of the Portfolio activities. They must declare the absence of any conflict of interest.

5.0 CALL FOR EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST

The Call for Expressions of Interest will be used to compile a list of projects interested in participating in the North Sea Regional Portfolio.

The call is published on the Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership website and promoted through national, regional, and EU level channels to reach projects active in the North Sea sea-basin, and supported through a range of national, regional, and EU funding instruments. Efforts will be made to ensure broad geographic representation, gender balance, and participation from a diverse range of blue economy stakeholders across the quadruple-helix[5], including industry, government, research organisations, and civil society.

5.1 Selection procedure

The Call for Expressions of Interest consists of a single-step application process, submitted through an online questionnaire. **The deadline for submitting an application is the 9th of December 2026 (15H00 CET, Brussels time)**.

The Secretariat will conduct an eligibility assessment of the submitted interest based on the eligibility criteria as defined in 5.2.

Based on the eligibility assessment, the Portfolio Secretariat will present to the Portfolio Board a list of projects proposed for participation in the North Sea Regional Portfolio. The list will also provide an overview of the geographical and gender balance, stakeholder representation, and the funding sources (Partnership, regional, national, or EU level).

The Portfolio Board will review the list of eligible projects and recommend those to be invited to participate in the North Sea Regional Portfolio. In doing so, it will seek to maximise as far as possible:

- *The geographical reach,*
- *The gender balance,*
- *The representation of young researchers,*
- *The representation of quadruple-helix stakeholders,*
- *The efficiency and the impact of the portfolios by limiting the size of the portfolios (15 projects maximum per portfolio),*

[5] A quadruple-helix collaboration ('QHC') is a form of collaboration in research and development between the four major sectors of society: industry, government, research institutes, and the public. For more information, please consult the report entitled 'Quadruple Helix Collaborations in Practice: Stakeholder Interaction, Responsibility and Governance' from RICONFIGURE.

- *The variety and the balance of the funding sources (Partnership co-funded projects and projects funded by other national, regional, and EU funding streams addressing the North Sea).*

The Secretariat will send an official invitation to the recommended projects on behalf of the Portfolio Board to participate in the Portfolio activities.

A final list of selected projects will be published on the Partnership website.

5.2 Eligibility criteria

Applicants must prove the fulfillment of the following eligibility criteria in the online application form (see 5.3). Applicants that do not meet all the eligibility criteria of the chosen Regional Portfolio will be declined without any review by the Portfolio Board.

1. Scope of projects' R&I activities: Projects must fall in the scope of at least one sub-thematic described in 2.0.

2. Duration of Projects: Projects must be active and ongoing during the Regional Portfolio Action timeframe (from January 2027 to early 2029), for at least 6 months.

3. Source of Funding: Projects must be recipient of a national, regional, or EU grant.

Example: projects to join the Portfolios may be financially supported by the following funding streams:

- *The EU Missions, esp. the Mission "Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030"*
- *EU Partnerships of the Cluster 6 (Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment) or instruments from other HE relevant Cluster*
- *Other relevant Initiatives like the JPIs: OCEANS, Climate, Water*
- *EC DG-RTD funding streams in H2020, EC DG-MARE funding streams including EMFAF, EC DG-ENV including Life*
- *INTERREG and Interregional Innovation Investments (I3) and structural funds (ERDF)*
- *National/regional funding instruments*

4. Geographical scope of Projects: Projects must target at least the North Sea (other sea-basins may be targeted, in addition to the North Sea). Projects that submit an interest and are eligible to be part of another Regional Portfolio (i.e. Atlantic Ocean, Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea, or Baltic Sea Regional Portfolios) will be asked to rank the portfolios in order of preference.

5. Project Representative and alternate (if any):

Each project should be represented by a Project Representative (Principal Investigator (PI), or other appointed consortium member). A second representative of the project consortium can be proposed as alternate at the submission step.

- *The Project Representative has the responsibility for submitting the interest on behalf of the project's consortium*
- *The Project Representative and alternate (if any) must belong to one of the four major sectors of the quadruple helix: industry, government, research institutes, and civil society.*
- *Representatives must have the professional capacity and relevant expertise to participate in the Regional Portfolio activities. Representatives must have good oral and written communication skills in English, to ensure effective exchanges and activities of the Regional Portfolio. As part of the application, projects will be asked to demonstrate the profiles' relevance (as project representatives), expertise, and communication skills.*

6. Commitment, availability capacity to engage:

Project Representatives must have capacity to commit to the Regional Portfolio Activities (including 2 in person meetings and regular portfolio online meetings every 2 months) and must prove their ability to allocate the necessary resources to participate in the Portfolio activities (self-funding).

The self-declaration of availability and commitment to participate in the Portfolio activities will be required when completing the online submission form (checkbox). By ticking this box on behalf of the project, the Project Representative confirms that the consortium commits to participating in the Regional Portfolio activities. This self-declaration, confirms:

- *the availability and the commitment of the project to participate in the Portfolio activities, including two in-person meetings (venues to be determined).*
- *the capacity of the project to engage with other projects' quadruple helix stakeholders operating at (local)regional/national/European scale.*
- *the ability of the project to cover the cost of participation to the Portfolio activities, including the travel/accommodation costs related to the two in-person meetings (venues to be determined).*

5.3 How to apply

Projects Representatives (PI or appointed consortium member), and the alternate (if any), are requested to submit their interest by filling out an online questionnaire available on the SBEP website **by the 9th of December at 15H00 (CET, Brussels time)**.

In the application, the fulfillment of the eligibility criteria should be clearly stated and projects representatives nominated (see previous sections for details).

The submission of interest through the online questionnaire is mandatory to confirm the application. Therefore, applicants are requested to fill out the form with all the required information to be considered for selection. One questionnaire will be open for three Regional Portfolios in the second wave of calls. The first wave of calls, open since the 29th of July 2026, addresses the two other Regional Portfolios (see 6.0) and has its proper online questionnaire. Projects applying to Regional Portfolios in both waves of calls will need to fill the required information in the two respective online forms.

The Portfolio Secretariat and Board reserve the right to request any further evidence to verify the fulfillment of the above-mentioned eligibility criteria, the organisation status and/or the expertise and experience the nominated representatives. All submissions of interest will be treated as confidential.

Questions related to applications may be addressed to sbep-portfolio@anr.fr.

6.0 TIMELINE

DATE	ACTIVITY
July 29th 2026, 15H00 CEST (Brussels time)	Launch of the first wave of Calls for Expressions of Interest: Atlantic Ocean Regional Portfolio and Black Sea Regional Portfolio.
September 9th 2026, 15H00 CEST (Brussels time)	Launch of the second wave of Calls for expressions of interest: Baltic Sea Regional Portfolio, **North Sea Regional Portfolio**, and Mediterranean Sea Regional Portfolio.
October 7th 2026, 13H00 to 14H30 CEST (Brussels time)	**Information Webinar on the Five Regional Portfolios Calls for Expressions of Interest**. Registration link
October 28th 2026, 15H00 CET (Brussels time)	Submission deadline of the first wave of Calls for Expressions of Interest (Atlantic Ocean Regional Portfolio, Black Sea Regional Portfolio).
November 2026	Eligibility assessment of submitted projects by Portfolio Secretariat. Selection of projects by the Portfolio Board.
December 9th 2026, 15H00 CET (Brussels time)	Submission deadline of the second wave of Calls for Expressions of Interest (Baltic Sea Regional Portfolio, **North Sea Regional Portfolio**, Mediterranean Sea Regional Portfolio).

January 2027	Announcement of the results of Wave 2 to the Project Representatives (Baltic Sea Regional Portfolio, **North Sea Regional Portfolio**, Mediterranean Sea Regional Portfolio).
First quarter of 2027	North Sea Regional Portfolio kick-off meeting, back-to-back with a relevant regional event (a first kick-off may be held online, depending on the date of the regional event). The kick-off meeting of the other Regional Portfolios will be held within the same period.
2027 to 2029	Online meetings for Regional Portfolio members.
Early 2029	Final meeting (on-site and preferably back-to-back with another SBEP or regional event).

7.0 PUBLISHABLE INFORMATION

A list of the selected projects will be published at the end of the call process (once the projects have been selected) on the Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership website. Therefore, applicants should be aware that the following information from the projects may be published by the partnership: (1) Project Title and Project Acronym, (2) Publishable abstract, (3) Duration of the project, (4) Project consortium composition (organisation and country), (5) Name of the Project Representatives, (6) Origin of funding grant.

8.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

The Partnership applies the EU policy of equal opportunities and accepts applications without distinction on the grounds of age, race, political, philosophical or religious conviction, gender or sexual orientation and regardless of disabilities, material status or family situation.

9.0 PRIVACY POLICY

By applying, the Representatives agree to the use, share (for specific purposes: e.g. selection process, Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership-specific communication) and the storage of projects-related information according to the Partnership Privacy Policy and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The Regional Portfolio Projects Representatives shall comply with the SBEP Privacy Policy according to the Grant Agreement number #101086379 and relevant national, regional and EU regulations.