



BlueBio - Blue Bioeconomy ERA-NET Cofund – Unlocking the Potential of Aquatic Bioresources

National Rules for Participation – State Aid

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1. Introduction

Funding Party: Malta Council for Science and Technology for and on behalf of the Foundation for Science and Technology,
Villa Bighi, Kalkara, KKR 1320
Malta

1.1 Scope and Focus

The ERA-NET BlueBio aims at achieving a sustainable and competitive Blue Bioeconomy in Europe.

The Blue Bio network is organizing a second joint call for proposals. This call will be focusing on **advancing the supply systems in the blue bioeconomy value chains**. More information on the scope and expected impact of the call can be found in the Blue Bio Call Text.

Each project proposal must be in accordance with the following:

- The project proposal must fall within the scope of the Call
- The project proposal consortium must consist of **at least three** independent legal entities from **at least two (2)** Blue Bio partner countries.
- All project proposals must involve both **research organisations** and **industry**. Participation of SMEs is especially encouraged.
- Project proposal consortia should consist of a maximum of ten (10) eligible partners. Entities coming from partner or non-partner countries that are participating with own funds are not to be included in this number.
- Both the pre-proposal and the proposal must be written in English
- In every proposal, one of the entities must act as the Project Coordinator who has the responsibility for submitting the application on behalf of the Consortium.
- The eligibility of each applicant must be checked according to the national criteria published in the National Rules before submission.
- Each proposal submitted correctly and on time will be checked for eligibility in its entirety. This means that failure of one partner within the consortium to meet the criteria will cause the entire project to be rejected

1.2 National Contact Point

Correspondence should be directed to:
The Malta Council for Science & Technology
Villa Bighi, Kalkara KKR 1320, Malta
E-mail: international.mcst@gov.mt

1.3 Definitions

Applicant means anyone eligible for participation in a Project in terms of these Rules for Participation and who consequently applies for funding under this joint initiative.

Arm's length means that the conditions of the transaction between the contracting parties do not differ from those which would be stipulated between independent enterprises and contain no element of

collusion. Any transaction that results from an open, transparent and non-discriminatory procedure is considered as meeting the arm's length principle.

Effective collaboration means collaboration between at least two independent parties to exchange knowledge or technology, or to achieve a common objective based on the division of labour where the parties jointly define the scope of the collaborative project, contribute to its implementation and share its risks, as well as its results. One or several parties may bear the full costs of the project and thus relieve other parties of its financial risks. Contract research and provision of research services are not considered forms of collaboration.

Eligible undertakings are defined as undertakings that carry out an economic activity within the meaning of Article 107 TFEU and are planning to carry out Fundamental, Industrial Research or Experimental Development projects are eligible to apply for assistance under this incentive. In order to be eligible, applicants must additionally satisfy the following criteria. They must be either:

- i. a partnership constituted under the Companies Act, being a partnership en nom collectif, en commandite or a limited liability company; or
- ii. a body of persons constituted, incorporated or registered outside Malta and of a nature similar to the aforesaid partnerships and registered as an overseas company in accordance with the Companies Act; or
- iii. 'Cooperatives' duly registered as a co-operative society under the Co-Operative Societies Act; or
- iv. 'Professional Body': which may be an organisation, an association, a chamber, society, institute or a group of professional persons not being enrolled or registered in terms of The Voluntary Organisations Act (Cap. 492 of the Laws of Malta) or not being otherwise recognised in terms of Law, and which is generally recognised and acknowledged by the professional persons it seeks to represent as their representative Body. For the purposes of this Definition, a professional person is one who has undergone a period of study at a university or a recognised institution of higher learning and has obtained the formal qualification entitling the person to practise the respective profession; and who provides a specialised service to the public, based primarily on a fiduciary relationship between herself/himself and the party to whom s/he provides such service on his own personal credibility and responsibility; or
- v. 'Self-employed' as registered with Jobsplus; or
- vi. "NGO": any Voluntary or Non-Governmental Organisation set up in accordance with The Voluntary Organisations Act (Cap. 492 of the Laws of Malta); or
- vii. 'Nonprofit Making Entity': an entity where (a) the statute of the entity contains an express exclusion of the purpose to make profits; and (b) there is express provision in the statute defining the purposes of the entity which do not include the promotion of private interests, other than a private interest which is a social purpose; and (c) no part of the income, capital or property is available directly or indirectly to any promoter, founder, member, administrator, donor or any other private interest. Provided that if a promoter, founder, member, administrator or donor is another enrolled non-profit making organisation, the limitation in paragraph (c) shall not apply provided the availability of such income, capital or property is subject to conditions which are consistent with the general purposes of the grantor entity: Provided further that an organisation shall continue to be deemed as non-profit making notwithstanding that:(i) it obtains a pecuniary gain from its activities when such gain is not received or credited to its members but is exclusively utilised for its established purposes; (ii) it buys or sells or otherwise deals in goods or services where such activities are exclusively related to its principal purposes; (iii) it is established for the

general entertainment, pastime, education or other similar benefit only of its members; or (iv) it is established for the promotion of the social role, ethics, education and values of a trade or profession provided it does not promote the private interests of its members; or

- viii. **Public Entity:** any Maltese Public Service Department or Maltese Public Sector Entity, or any Maltese Legal Entity which has more than 50% government shareholding. Public Service refers to all Ministries and Departments; and Public Sector Entities refers to authorities, corporations, agencies and commercial public-sector entities in which the Government has a majority shareholding and that are not listed on the stock exchange. Public Entities also include foundations, local councils and public academic entities. In the case of public academic entities, this includes but is not limited to a higher education entity or a research institute, whether as a whole body or as a component unit or department within such body, provided that the entity's ongoing education and research is scientifically in line with the subject of the application being submitted during this call provided that the higher education entity must be in possession of a license for Higher Education according to the Further and Higher Education (Licensing, Accreditation and Quality Assurance) Regulations – Subsidiary Legislation 327.433. This does not include the license for a tuition center; or
- ix. **Research and knowledge-dissemination organization:** an entity (such as universities or research institutes, technology transfer agencies, innovation intermediaries, research-oriented physical or virtual collaborative entities), irrespective of its legal status (organised under public or private law) or way of financing, whose primary goal is to independently conduct fundamental research, industrial research or experimental development or to widely disseminate the results of such activities by way of teaching, publication or knowledge transfer. Where such entity also pursues economic activities the financing, the costs and the revenues of those economic activities must be accounted for separately. Undertakings that can exert a decisive influence upon such an entity, in the quality of, for example, shareholders or members, may not enjoy preferential access to the results generated by it;

Eligible direct costs are those costs incurred directly by the national beneficiaries during the duration of the project and used primarily for the purpose of achieving the objectives of the project. All eligible expenses must be incurred between the Start Date and the End Date of the Project and must be limited to the budgeted value.

End Date means the date when the Project Period, having commenced on the Start Date, expires. The Project Period is the time required to execute the Project as indicated in the grant agreement.

Innovation is defined as the internationally novel scientific/technological development of a technological process, product or service. Also, the definition of innovation within the same context can also be applied to non-novel, yet step-change/ground-breaking enhancement of existing technological processes, products or services, or even the application of existing knowledge to new novel applications of these solutions to deliver step-change competitiveness through such an application.

Large undertaking is an undertaking not fulfilling the criteria laid down in Annex I of the COMMISSION REGULATION (EU) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty.

Legal Entity means any entity created within the European Economic Community, having an operating base in Malta and which has legal personality, which may, acting under its own name, exercise rights and be subject to obligations.

Linked enterprises are enterprises which have any of the relationships with each other outlined in Annex I of the COMMISSION REGULATION (EU) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty.

Operating base in Malta means if the legal entity:

- a. owns, leases, or has been given the right of use by a third party, an adequate premises from where to conduct an eligible economic activity in the region of Malta;
and
- b. employs at least one person that is based in Malta and is liable to pay income tax in Malta.

Project Value means the entire project budget including any co-financing.

Partner is defined as a partner in a consortium of a funded transnational project

Personnel costs means the costs of researchers, technicians and other supporting staff to the extent employed on the relevant project or activity

Project Coordinator is one of the beneficiaries of a project consortium that is appointed as the single point of contact between the BlueBio consortium and/or the funding bodies and the consortium partners from proposal submission to project end. He/she will have the responsibility of ensuring that all the partners involved in the consortium are eligible and supervises the project workflow with the help of WP leaders. Additionally, he/she will be required to submit the project application on behalf of the consortium and must also compile and submit reports / deliverables to the funding bodies which in turn will relay these documents to the BlueBio consortium.

Project Contact Point is the individual, appointed to act on behalf of the Applicant and who is responsible for communicating with MCST about the Project.

Project Grant means the granted funding provided.

Research and Development is defined as the systematic investigation, work or research carried out in any field of science or technology through experiment, theoretical work or analysis undertaken in order to acquire new knowledge, primarily directed towards a specific practical aim or objective, and includes:

- a) **Fundamental Research** means experimental or theoretical work undertaken primarily to acquire new knowledge of the underlying foundations of phenomena and observable facts, without any direct commercial application or use in view
- b) **Industrial Research** means the planned research or critical investigation aimed at the acquisition of new knowledge and skills for developing new products, processes or services or for bringing about a significant improvement in existing products, processes or services. It comprises the creation of components parts of complex systems, and may include the construction of prototypes in a laboratory environment or in an environment with simulated interfaces to existing systems as well as of pilot lines, when necessary for the industrial research and notably for generic technology validation
- c) **Experimental Development** means acquiring, combining, shaping and using existing scientific, technological, business and other relevant knowledge and skills with the aim of developing new or improved products, processes or services. This may also include, for example, activities aiming at the conceptual definition, planning and documentation of new products, processes or services

Experimental development may comprise prototyping, demonstrating, piloting, testing and validation of new or improved products, processes or services in environments representative of real life operating conditions where the primary objective is to make further technical

improvements on products, processes or services that are not substantially set. This may include the development of a commercially usable prototype or pilot which is necessarily the final commercial product and which is too expensive to produce for it to be used only for demonstration and validation purposes.

Experimental development does not include routine or periodic changes made to existing products, production lines, manufacturing processes, services and other operations in progress, even if those changes may represent improvements;

Single Undertaking includes all enterprises having at least one of the following relationships with each other:

- i. One enterprise has a majority of the shareholders' or members' voting rights in another enterprise;
- ii. One enterprise has the right to appoint or remove a majority of the members of the administrative, management or supervisory body of another enterprise;
- iii. One enterprise has the right to exercise a dominant influence on another enterprise pursuant to a contract entered into with that enterprise or to a provision in its memorandum or articles of association;
- iv. One enterprise, which is a shareholder in or member of another enterprise, controls alone, pursuant to an agreement with other shareholders in or members of that enterprise, a majority of shareholders' or members' voting rights in that enterprise.

Enterprises having any of the relationships referred to in points (i) to (iv) above through one or more other enterprises shall be considered to be a single undertaking,

Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) is an undertaking which fulfils the criteria laid down in Annex I of Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty.

Start of Works means the earlier of either the start of construction works relating to the investment, or the first legally binding commitment to order equipment or any other commitment that makes the investment irreversible. Buying land and preparatory works such as obtaining permits and conducting feasibility studies are not considered start of works. For take-overs, 'start of works' means the moment of acquiring the assets directly linked to the acquired establishment.

Start-up Undertaking shall be defined as an enterprise that has been established for less than five (5) years following its registration. For eligible undertakings that are not subject to registration, the five year eligibility period may be considered to start from the moment when the enterprise either starts its economic activity or is liable to tax for its economic activity.

Start Date means the date which is stated in the grant agreement for the official start of the project.

Subcontracted Activity means any activity related to the project, (including but not limited to consultancy), which is not carried out directly by a Partner or its employees but is carried out by any third party (local or foreign) individual, company, partnership or entity, under whatsoever terms and conditions.

Undertaking in Difficulty means an undertaking in respect of which at least one of the following circumstances occurs:

- (a) In the case of a limited liability company (other than an SME that has been in existence for less than three years or, for the purposes of eligibility for risk finance aid, an SME within 7 years from its first commercial sale that qualifies for risk finance investments following due diligence by the selected financial intermediary), where more than half of its subscribed share capital has disappeared as a result of accumulated losses. This is the case when deduction of accumulated losses from reserves (and all other elements generally considered as part of the own funds of the company) leads to a negative cumulative amount that exceeds half of the subscribed share capital. For the purposes of this provision, 'limited liability company' refers in particular to the types of company mentioned in Annex I of Directive 2013/34/EU and 'share capital' includes, where relevant, any share premium.

- (b) In the case of a company where at least some members have unlimited liability for the debt of the company (other than an SME that has been in existence for less than three years or, for the purposes of

eligibility for risk finance aid, an SME within 7 years from its first commercial sale that qualifies for risk finance investments following due diligence by the selected financial intermediary), where more than half of its capital as shown in the company accounts has disappeared as a result of accumulated losses. For the purposes of this provision, 'a company where at least some members have unlimited liability for the debt of the company' refers in particular to the types of company mentioned in Annex II of Directive 2013/34/EU.

(c) Where the undertaking is subject to collective insolvency proceedings or fulfils the criteria under its domestic law for being placed in collective insolvency proceedings at the request of its creditors.

(d) Where the undertaking has received rescue aid and has not yet reimbursed the loan or terminated the guarantee, or has received restructuring aid and is still subject to a restructuring plan.

(e) In the case of an undertaking that is not an SME, where, for the past two years: the undertaking's book debt to equity ratio has been greater than 7.5 and the undertaking's EBITDA interest coverage ratio has been below 1.0.

2. Eligibility for Participation

2.1 Partner Eligibility

Any Eligible Undertaking (as defined in Section 1.3) that carries out an economic activity within the meaning of Article 107 TFEU may apply and will be eligible for funding subject to the terms and conditions laid out in this document and the conditions for eligibility in Regulation A and B.

For assistance provided under Regulation B of the National Rules for Participation, no aid may be granted to a beneficiary which is subject to an outstanding recovery order following a previous Commission Decision declaring an aid granted by Malta illegal and incompatible with the common market.

Applicants, who fall within the definition of Eligible Undertaking, will be required to provide the following documents which will be considered during the national eligibility check stage (to be included as an annex to the National Application Form or else provide authorization to MCST to obtain directly from the Malta Business Registry):

- Memorandum & Articles of Association or other constitutive document;
- Audited financial statements for last 3 fiscal years (2 sets).

In the event that the Applicant is a start-up and the above documents are not available, the Applicant shall provide the financial projections for three (3) years signed by an auditor, including:

- an income statement,
- a cash flow statement, and
- a statement of financial position

In the event that the review of these documents may result in too high an exposure risk to MCST, the Applicant will no longer be entitled to participate in the project.

Applicants who have other funded projects with MCST and are in default, and/or have gone beyond the timelines of the project, are not eligible to participate.

Any application submitted by or including the participation of any legal person or legal entity having, in totality or in majority ownership, the same shareholders, partners or persons holding and / or exercising a controlling power in any other legal entity which will have been at any time prior to such application declared as non-compliant or defaulting on any other contract or agreement entered into with MCST, shall be

automatically declared as inadmissible.

Under Regulation B, aid will not be granted to undertakings in difficulty (within the meaning of the General Block Exemption Regulation).

Funding under this scheme is made available on the basis that the Applicant has not benefited and will not benefit from any other grant or financial incentive of whatever nature, applied for and/or utilised for the same costs and scope as that subject of the funding requested under this scheme.

3. Funding Criteria

The funds for the national beneficiaries participating in the project consortium will be made available in accordance with these rules and regulations.

3.1 Project Duration

Project duration should be a maximum of three (3) years. The earliest possible starting date for projects will be fixed at the beginning of the contract negotiations with the national funding organisations.

3.2 Application Process

Applicants are to submit an application for assistance under this scheme before the start of works.

The application process consists of a two-stage submission process. The pre-proposal and the full proposal are required to be submitted electronically by the Project Coordinator via the BlueBio online submission tool.

Additionally, a National Application Form is to be submitted by each National applicant via eusubmissions.mcst@gov.mt.

Only complete National Application Forms shall be considered.

3.3 Submission Deadline

Deadline for submission of pre-proposal can be found on <https://bluebioeconomy.eu/>

Deadline for submission of National Application Form will be on the same day of the submission deadline of the pre-proposals.

3.4 Grant Value

The maximum amount national partner/s can request per project is €300,000.

Funding for successful project submissions will be based on a periodic cash advance and will be regulated through a contractual agreement establishing the terms and conditions governing the financing of the project.

Funding under this joint initiative is made available on the basis that an Applicant does not benefit from any other grant or financial incentive in respect of the expenses related to execution of the project.

3.5 Project Contact Point

The national applicant/s shall appoint a Project Contact Point/s. The Project Contact Point/s shall have the following responsibilities:

- To ensure compliance with their obligations in terms of the Contractual Agreement;
- To compile Periodic Reports and Final Reports including their timely submissions and effective execution of the project;
- To execute the project activities according to set timeframes and deliverables.

3.6 Deliverables

Mandatory deliverables for Regulation A:

1. A showcase of the project to the general public by the national project partner through:
 - The publication of at least two (2) articles per year in, magazines or online platforms. These should not contain intellectual property but should raise awareness about the project and its benefits.
 - The organisation of at least one half-day event to be held at MCST's premises or as otherwise directed by MCST.
2. Proof of submission of an article to a peer-reviewed journal for eventual publication

Mandatory Deliverables for Regulation A and B:

1. Project Plan giving details of the deliverables and activities found within the project proposal.
2. Reporting on project progress as per the list hereunder in line with the templates provided by MCST;
 - End of Stage Technical and Scientific Reports;
 - End of Stage Financial Report;
 - End of Project Technical and Scientific Report;
 - End of Project Audited Financial Report.

The reports are to include sufficient evidence on the achievement of the project objectives as well as the parameters indicated in the application.

Changes to the project objectives, deliverables, work-packages and all the parameters committed in the applications are to be detailed, justified and approved by MCST.

Recommended deliverables (for both Regulation A and B)

Further to the mandatory deliverables, MCST invites applications to also include deliverables as recommended below:

1. Monograph/s and/or peer-reviewed paper/s for accepted publication in international journal/s of repute based on the work carried out through the Project. The subscription levels or Impact Factor of journals are important considerations. Similar papers published on open source media would also be considered favourably.
2. Oral presentation/s at international conference/s on the work carried out through the Project.
3. The attainment of undergraduate degrees and/or postgraduate degrees and/or post-doctoral research. In cases where the project duration is insufficient for the purpose of submitting a degree,

there has to be a commitment to complete the degree outside the duration of the project utilising other sources of funding.

4. Registration of a patent or other Intellectual Property Rights stemming from the Project, in Malta as well as in any other country.
5. Commercial commitments such as technology innovations to be included in a partner's existing product or service.
6. Commercial commitments such as technology transfer licences.

4. List of Eligible and Ineligible Costs

4.1 Eligible Costs

Applicants may opt for **one (1)** of the following two regulations. Applicants are required to indicate their preference within the National Application Form.

Eligible costs are those costs incurred directly by the project partner during the duration of the project and used primarily for the purpose of achieving the objectives of the project.

All expenses must be incurred between the Start Date and the End Date of the project and must be limited to the budgeted value.

Please contact MCST for more information on the implications of these State Aid Rules.

4.1.1. Eligible Costs under Regulation A: [Commission Regulation \(EU\) No. 1407/2013 of 18 December 2013 on the application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union to de minimis aid \(the de minimis Regulation\)](#)

a) Personnel Costs

Wages of researchers and technical personnel, and other supporting staff, to the extent and for the duration that they are directly engaged on the approved research project.

- i. Eligible wage costs shall be limited to the actual salary as defined in the employment contract of the employee as well as the corresponding National Insurance that is incurred by the employer (if applicable).
- ii. All employees in respect of whom wage costs are claimed must be registered with Jobsplus and covered by a valid contract of employment in terms of the national legislation on employment.
- iii. Personnel costs are calculated using an hourly rate calculated on the employee's basic wage. The total hours worked by a full-time employee shall be established as 1760 hours per annum.
- iv. Personnel Costs related to Project Management are further limited to 10% of the project value.
- v. Students can be engaged on the project and paid an annual stipend of €6,000 when reading for a Master's degree. Note that for every engaged student, a full-time researcher must be employed by the applicant. The eligible costs for stipends are limited to a maximum of two years.

Filled consolidated time sheets are to be retained for all personnel, including students, as proof of number of hours spent on the project.

b) Specialised equipment and research consumables

Purchase of specialised equipment including software. Overall value of consumables typically cannot

exceed 30% of project value. Proposals with consumables exceeding 30% of the project value need to be discussed at application stage.

c) Travel and Subsistence

For the attendance of consortium meetings, only 1 person will be eligible to attend the meeting.

For the attendance of international conferences, only 1 person will be eligible to attend per year.

Eligible costs under this section include the cost of economy flights, public transport and other expenses that have been incurred for the purpose of the project after selection of the most economic solutions. Per diems are payable for travel up to a maximum of 14 days in a row.

d) Other Operating Expenses

Other operating expenses incurred directly as a result of the project. These must be approved beforehand by MCST and must not fall under ineligible costs.

e) Costs of IP and knowledge transfer activities

Costs of knowledge transfer activities and patents bought or licensed from outside sources at arm's length conditions

f) Overheads

Overheads will be covered at 20% of direct eligible costs.

Overheads for equipment and consumables will be covered at 10% of direct eligible costs.

Overheads for equipment will be covered at 10% of direct eligible costs and are capped at a maximum of €500 per piece.

Overheads for all consumables will be covered at 10% of direct eligible costs and are capped at a maximum of €500.

Overheads in relation to subcontracting activities are not eligible.

g) Subcontracted activities

Subcontracted activities shall be allowed up to a limit of 10% of the project value, provided that prior approval is attained from MCST before subcontracting to ensure fair procurement procedures.

Additional Provisions

Eligible Costs are to conform to the following and are subject to the final audit scrutiny:

- Any expenses incurred during the course of the project must be consistent with the principles of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.
- Any calls for the recruitment of staff on a project is to be conducted in a strictly transparent manner and is to include a public call in the form of an online advert and interview process.
- Commercial transactions between any applicants or consortium partners, or between any applicants or a consortium partner and a company with similar shareholding to a consortium partner, is not allowed. All transactions need to be carried out in line with the arm's length principle outlined in Section 1.3.

Aid Intensity

The financial contribution to a project partner applying under Regulation A shall be 75% of the eligible costs incurred on the project by that project partner. The partner must finance the remaining 25% of the eligible costs. It is not possible for a Partner to cover the contribution of 25% 'in-kind'.

Applicable State Aid Regulations and Obligations

Assistance provided under Regulation A of these National Rules for Participation is in line with the [Commission Regulation \(EU\) No. 1407/2013 of 18 December 2013 on the application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union to de minimis aid \(the de minimis Regulation\), as may be amended.](#)

The total amount of *de minimis* aid granted to a single undertaking shall not exceed the amount of €200,000 over any period of three consecutive fiscal years. The total amount of *de minimis* aid granted to a single undertaking performing road freight transport for hire or reward shall not exceed €100 000 over any period of three fiscal years.

This aggregate maximum threshold applies in principle to all economic sectors with the exception of the agriculture and fisheries sectors for which different thresholds and criteria apply. The term 'undertaking' includes also all companies in a group (which fall under the direct or indirect ownership or control of the same ultimate parent company) and relevant partner and linked enterprises as defined in Annex I of Commission Regulation (EU No 651/2014). This period covers the fiscal year concerned as well as the previous two fiscal years. 'Fiscal year' means the fiscal year as used for tax purposes by the undertaking concerned.

This maximum threshold would include all State aid granted under this aid scheme and any other State aid measure granted under the *de minimis* rule including that received from any entity other than the Malta Council for Science and Technology. Any *de minimis* aid received in excess of the established threshold will have to be recovered, with interest, from the undertaking receiving the aid.

The de minimis declaration form must be filled in and submitted together with the application form.

Assistance approved under this aid scheme is NOT:

- i. Aid granted to undertakings active in the fishery and aquaculture sector, as covered by Council Regulation (EC) No. 104/2000;
- ii. Aid granted to undertakings active in the primary production of agricultural products;
- iii. Aid granted to undertakings active in the sector of processing and marketing of agricultural products, in the following cases:
 - a. Where the amount of the aid is fixed on the basis of the price or quantity of such products purchased from primary producers or put on the market by the undertakings concerned;
 - b. Where the aid is conditional on being partly or entirely passed on to primary producers;
- iv. Aid to export-related activities towards third countries or Member States, namely aid directly linked to the quantities exported, to the establishment and operation of a distribution network or to other current expenditure linked to the export activity;
- v. Aid contingent upon the use of domestic over imported goods;
- vi. Aid for the acquisition of road freight transport vehicles granted to undertakings performing road freight transport for hire or reward.

Where an undertaking is active in the sectors referred to in points (i), (ii) and (iii) above as well as in other sectors falling within the scope of the *de minimis Regulation*, MCST will ensure a separation of the activities or distinction of costs. Only those sectors eligible for assistance under the *de minimis Regulation* will be assisted. Activities in the sectors excluded from the scope of the *de minimis Regulation* will not benefit from assistance under this aid scheme.

In terms of Article 5 of the *de minimis Regulation*, *de minimis* aid granted under this initiative may be cumulated with *de minimis* aid granted in accordance with Commission Regulation (EU) No 360/2012 up to the ceiling

laid down in that Regulation. It may be cumulated with *de minimis* aid granted in accordance with other *de minimis* regulations up to the relevant ceiling fixed in terms of these National Rules for Participation.

De minimis aid approved under this initiative shall not be cumulated with State aid in relation to the same eligible costs or with State aid for the same risk finance measure, if such cumulation would exceed the highest relevant aid intensity or aid amount fixed in the specific circumstances of each case by a block exemption regulation or a decision adopted by the European Commission. *de minimis aid* which is not granted for or attributable to specific eligible costs may be cumulated with other State aid granted under a block exemption regulation or a decision adopted by the Commission.

4.1.2. Eligible Costs under Regulation B: [Commission Regulation \(EU\) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty.](#)

a) Personnel Costs

Wages of researchers and technical personnel, and other supporting staff, to the extent and for the duration that they are directly engaged on the approved research project.

- i. Eligible wage costs shall be limited to the actual salary as defined in the employment contract of the employee as well as the corresponding National Insurance that is incurred by the employer (if applicable).
- ii. All employees in respect of whom wage costs are claimed must be registered with Jobsplus and covered by a valid contract of employment in terms of the national legislation on employment.
- iii. Personnel costs are calculated using an hourly rate calculated on the employee's basic wage. The total hours worked by a full time employee shall be established as 1760 hours per annum.
- iv. Personnel Costs related to Project Management are further limited to 10% of the project value.
- v. Students can be engaged on the project and paid an annual stipend of €6,000 when reading for a Master's degree. Note that for every engaged student, a full-time researcher must be employed by the applicant. The eligible costs for stipends are limited to a maximum of two years.

Filled consolidated time sheets are to be retained for all personnel, including students, as proof of number of hours spent on the project.

b) Specialised equipment and research consumables

Purchase of specialised equipment, including software, to the extent and for the period used for the project. Overall value of consumables typically cannot exceed 30% of project value. Proposals with consumables exceeding 30% of the project value need to be discussed at application stage.

Where such equipment and consumables are not used for their full life for the project, only the depreciation costs corresponding to the life of the project, as calculated on the basis of generally accepted accounting principles, are considered as eligible.

The depreciation costs must be verified by a Certified Public Accountant.

c) Costs of IP and knowledge transfer activities

Costs of knowledge transfer activities and patents bought or licensed from outside sources at arm's length conditions.

d) Other Operating Expenses

Other operating expenses incurred directly as a result of the project. These must be approved beforehand by MCST and must not fall under ineligible costs.

e) Overheads

Overheads incurred directly as a result of the project will be covered at 20% of direct eligible costs.

Overheads for equipment and consumables will be covered at 10% of direct eligible costs.

Overheads for equipment will be covered at 10% of direct eligible costs and are capped at a maximum of €500 per piece.

Overheads for all consumables will be covered at 10% of direct eligible costs and are capped at a maximum of €500.

Overheads in relation to subcontracting activities are not eligible.

f) Subcontracted Activities

Subcontracted activities shall be allowed up to a limit of 10% of the project value, provided that prior approval is attained from MCST before subcontracting to ensure fair procurement procedures.

Aid Intensity

The aided part of the research and development project shall completely fall within one (1) or more of the following categories:

Type of Research	Small Undertaking	Medium Undertaking	Large Undertaking
Fundamental Research	100%	100%	100%
Industrial Research	70%	60%	50%
Industrial Research with an effective Collaboration and/or results are widely disseminated	80%	75%	65%
Experimental Development	45%	35%	25%
Experimental Development with an effective collaboration and/or results are widely disseminated	60%	50%	40%

The project involves **effective collaboration (as defined below and in Section 1.3) if the project is carried out:**

- a) Between undertakings among which at least one is an SME, or is carried out in at least two Member States, or in a Member State and in a Contracting Party of the EEA Agreement, and no single undertaking bears more than 70% of the eligible costs; or
- b) Between an undertaking and one or more research and knowledge-dissemination organisations, where the latter bear at least 10% of the eligible costs and have the right to publish their own research results.

The results of the project are **widely disseminated** by showcasing the project to the general public through:

- The publication of at least two (2) articles per year in local newspapers, magazines, online portals or online journals. These should not contain intellectual property but should raise awareness about the project and its benefits.
- The organisation of at least one (1) half-day event to be held at MCST's premises or as otherwise directed by MCST.
Proof of submission of an article for publication in a peer reviewed journal.

The amount of assistance granted to participants will not exceed the thresholds laid down in Article 4(1) (i) of Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014.

Additional Provisions

Eligible Costs are to conform to the following and are subject to the final audit scrutiny:

- Any expenses incurred during the course of the project must be consistent with the principles of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.
- Any calls for the recruitment of staff on a project is to be conducted in a strictly transparent manner and is to include a public call in the form of an online advert and interview process.
- Commercial transactions between any Applicants or consortium partners, or between any Applicants or a consortium partner and a company with similar shareholding to a consortium partner, is not allowed. All transactions need to be carried out in line with the arm's length principle outlined in Section 1.3.

Applicable State Aid Regulations and Obligations

The terms and conditions set out in Regulation B of these National Rules for Participation are in line with the [Commission Regulation \(EU\) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty](#), as amended by *Commission Regulation (EU) No 2017/1084 of 14 June 2017 amending Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 as regards aid for port and airport infrastructure, notification thresholds for aid for culture and heritage conservation and for aid for sport and multifunctional recreational infrastructures, and regional operating aid schemes for outermost regions and amending Regulation (EU) No 702/2014 as regards the calculation of eligible costs*), and as may be subsequently amended.

Assistance will not be granted if the aid is:

- i. related to export activities towards third countries or Member States, namely aid directly linked to quantities exported, to the establishment and operation of a distribution network or to the other current expenditure linked to export activity.
- ii. contingent upon the use of domestic in preference to imported goods.
- iii. granted in the sector of processing and marketing of agricultural products, in the following cases:
 - i. where the amount of the aid is fixed on the basis of the price or quantity of such products purchased from primary producers or put on the market by the undertakings concerned;
 - ii. where the aid is conditional on being partly or entirely passed on to primary producers;
- iv. granted in favour of a beneficiary which is subject to an outstanding recovery order following a previous Commission decision declaring an aid granted by Malta illegal and incompatible with the internal market.
- v. granted in favour of an undertaking in difficulty defined in terms of the Commission Regulation (EU)

No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014.

Aid approved by the Corporation in terms of these National Rules for Participation will be suspended until the undertaking has reimbursed old, unlawful and incompatible aid that is subject to a recovery.

Rule on *cumulation of aid* shall be in line with Article 8 of the Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 of 17th June 2014.

In determining whether the notification thresholds and the maximum aid intensities are respected, the total amount of State aid for the aided activity or project or undertaking shall be taken into account.

Where Union funding centrally managed by the institutions, agencies, joint undertakings or other bodies of the Union that is not directly or indirectly under the control of the Member State is combined with State aid, only the latter shall be considered for determining whether notification thresholds and maximum aid intensities or maximum aid amounts are respected, provided that the total amount of public funding granted in relation to the same eligible costs does not exceed the most favourable funding rate laid down in the applicable rules of Union law.

Aid granted under this incentive may only be cumulated with:

- a) any other State aid, as long as those measure concern different identifiable eligible costs,
- b) any other State aid, in relation to the same eligible costs, partly or fully overlapping, only if such cumulation does not exceed the highest aid intensity or aid amount applicable to the aid under Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014.

Aid awarded under these Incentive Guidelines shall not be cumulated with any *de minimis* aid in respect of the same eligible costs if such cumulation would result in an aid intensity exceeding those laid down in these Incentive Guidelines.

4.2 Ineligible Costs

The following expenditure shall be considered as ineligible costs:

- Expenses related to loans, interest, etc
- Recoverable value added tax.
- Expenses which are recoverable through other funding mechanisms.
- Re-purchase of equipment originally procured through other funding mechanisms.
- Purchase of equipment from partners or their subsidiaries.
- Opportunity costs related to foregone production and production downtime arising from the allocation of resources to the Project.
- Any activity related to the reproduction of a commercial product or process by a physical examination of an existing system or from plans, blueprints, detailed specifications or publicly available information.
- Standard office equipment.
- Personnel hours for travelling.
- Travel and Subsistence is an ineligible cost in relation to applications submitted under Regulation B
- Any other costs not listed down in Section 4.1.1 and 4.1.2.

5. Evaluation

Both pre-proposal and proposal applications will be checked for eligibility by both the BlueBio Call Secretariat as well as the individual participating entities. Apart from the overall preproposal and proposal submission done by the proposal coordinator through the BlueBio online submission platform, national partners will be required to submit a **National Application Form** to MCST which may be downloaded from

MCST's website or by contacting MCST.

MCST may undertake a due diligence exercise through its contractors for the purpose of administrative compliance.

Proposals that pass the eligibility check will then proceed to the scientific evaluation phase. Further information on this process is found in the call text.

For applications submitted under Regulation B of these National Rules for Participation, a Technical Evaluation Committee will be set up by MCST in order to assess:

- i. that the proposed research falls under one of the R&D definitions outlined in Section 1.3;
and
- ii. the type of eligible costs defined in Section 4.

The aid intensities will be awarded accordingly.

6. Post Selection Process

6.1 The Grant Agreement

For each project approved for funding, individual **Grant Agreements** will be signed between the successful Applicant and MCST. This Agreement will act as the basis for project funding and will regulate the transfer of funds to national beneficiaries based on these regulations.

The Project Coordinator has to decide with the project partners on a common starting date for the project and send this information to all the funding bodies involved in funding this project in order to ensure that the National Contracts are synchronised in time to cover all the periods of the project.

MCST reserves the right not to proceed with signing any National Grant Agreement in the event that it results that doing so would be too high an exposure risk to MCST.

The Project Contact Point must provide two (2) images related to the project and an abstract upon signing the Grant Agreement. These will be used to publicise the award.

6.2 Start Date and End Date

The project will start on a pre-determined date as agreed by all the respective parties and determined in the Grant Agreement.

In view of the particular nature of the Grant Agreement, the said agreement will not be signed simultaneously by all parties but will be signed by all the parties separately. Each party will signify the date of signing and the Grant Agreement will come into force on the date on which the final signature is made thereon (hereinafter the "Agreement Date").

Between the Agreement Date and the Start Date, the Project Contact Point should ensure that all activities required for a smooth project start are completed.

To be eligible for funding, all expenses must be incurred between the Start Date and the End Date of the Project.

6.3 Double Funding

Funding under this joint initiative is made available on the basis that the Applicant has not benefited and will not benefit from any other grant or financial incentive of whatever nature, applied for and/or utilised for the same scope as that subject of the funding requested under this joint initiative. Provided that, in the case

where the application covers work that is part of a larger project, the Applicant must submit a table as an appendix to the application form that shows a comprehensive list of the items of work and the source of funding for each item.

The Applicant will be required to sign a declaration to this effect and authorising MCST to exchange essential information related to the project with other funding agencies, both local and overseas, for any necessary checks.

6.4 Project Extensions

Time extension requests are unlikely to be accepted unless these are due to extenuating circumstances that are deemed by MCST as having been unavoidable by the partners following all efforts and best practice project management. In exceptional cases, even though MCST may deem a request for extension as valid, this would need to be endorsed by the other funding agencies of the participating partners in the project consortium, and vice versa. The Lead Agency must also be informed of such extensions and approval sought. If a common agreement is not reached between the funding bodies, the request will automatically be declined.

7. Funding, Management and Progress Monitoring

7.1 Allocation and Disbursement of Funding

Following the termination of the project or expiry of the Grant Agreement, the Project Contact Point will be required to submit a Final Technical Project Report for the whole project, thus covering the work undertaken.

For the purpose of funding and reporting, a project submission shall be divided into a number of Stages. Each Stage shall be of twelve (12) months duration. Funding for any one Stage shall not exceed 80% of the total project financial contribution due. Total financial contribution over the lifetime of the project shall not exceed the funding limit as established in the Grant Agreement, irrespective of actual expenditure.

The periodic funding will be allocated according to the following schedule:

1. For the first Stage, MCST will make an initial advance payment of 100% of the due financial contribution in relation to that particular Stage. This will be calculated on the Applicant's component of projected expenditure for that Stage, and include both direct and indirect costs.

In the case of a single-Stage project (one twelve (12) month period), MCST will make an advance payment to the applicant equivalent to 80% of the due financial contribution calculated on the projected costs. This will include both direct and indirect eligible costs.

2. At the end of each Stage, the Project Contact Point will be required to submit a Technical Stage Report and a Financial Stage Report to MCST with details of actual expenditure over the past stage, together with an updated forecast of projected expenditure for the following stage. Both stage reports have to be approved by MCST before moving to the next stage. This should be in line with the templates for stage and final reports as provided by MCST and which may be downloaded from MCST's website.
3. For the second and subsequent Stage, MCST will calculate the due financial contribution in relation to that particular Stage based on the Financial Stage Report submitted. This contribution will be calculated as forecast eligible expenditure, adjusted for any overspend or underspend of the preceding Stage.
4. Except for the final Stage of the project, MCST will make an advance payment equivalent to 100% of the due financial contribution in relation to that particular Stage, calculated as in bullet

(3) above.

5. For the final Stage of the project, MCST will make an advance payment of up to 80% of the due financial contribution calculated as in bullet (3) above. However, MCST shall retain 20% of the total project grant to be transferred only upon successful completion of the project.
6. Following the termination of the project or expiry of the Grant Agreement, the Project Contact Point will be required to submit a Final Technical Project Report together with a Final Financial Report for the whole project, thus covering the work and expenditure undertaken. The Final Financial Report needs to be audited by a certified auditor appointed by the Applicant and approved by MCST once submitted. The audit should determine the total eligible costs and compare these to the funds forwarded. MCST reserves the right to appoint an auditor to audit the Project Financial Audit as submitted.
7. As soon as the verifications and audits are finalised and cleared, MCST will release the retention money due. In the case of overpayment, the Applicant will be required to refund the under-spend amount to MCST within a specific timeframe, or as agreed to with MCST.

MCST reserves the right to alter the funding parameters as deemed appropriate.

7.2 Dissemination & Externalisation

Any articles and text material related to the project should include the words:

'Project <Project Name> funded by the Malta Council for Science and Technology through the BlueBio ERA-NET Cofund.'

Any websites or printed material related to the project should also include the MCST logo, and the BlueBio logo.

During the term of the Applicant shall include and prominently feature MCST and BlueBio in any publicity related to the project.

All publicity material shall be vetted and approved by MCST before publication and should make mention of the initiative and MCST. In the case where printed material is published without a mention of the initiative and MCST, the Applicant shall be obliged to publish a correction at its own expense in the subsequent issue of the publication.

7.3 Reporting

On the last day of a stage, an End of Stage Technical Report is to be presented to MCST. An End of Stage Financial Report is then to be submitted within one (1) month from the end of the stage.

On the last day of the project, the Project Contact Point is required to submit a Final Technical Project Report. Audited accounts are to be presented within one month from the end of the project.

MCST reserves the right to request additional project-related information.

Approval of the stage reports allows the beneficiary to proceed with the next stage of the project. Approval of the final reports permits the release of the retention.

In the event that a project is found to be in breach of the Grant Agreement or to materially depart from the submitted application, MCST reserves the right to discontinue the award and the applicant may be required to refund the Grant in part or in full. In any such event, MCST may also exclude an applicant from participating in future calls.

The applicant shall set a schedule for quarterly progress meetings with MCST to take place as part of the reporting work package.

The templates provided by MCST should be used to develop the End of Stage Technical and Financial Reports as well as the Final Technical and Financial Reports.

The End of Stage Technical and Financial Reports shall contain the following details:

- (i) An account of project activity and achievements over the past stage compared with the originally submitted application,
- (ii) An account of actual expenditure over the past stage compared with the originally submitted budgeted expenditure. All financial reports must be signed by the person responsible for the financial management, and assembled as per the instructions in the Grant Agreement,
- (iii) An updated forecast of project activity and projected achievements for the following stage
- (iv) An updated forecast of projected expenditure for the following stage.

The beneficiary shall appoint an auditor to conduct a detailed financial audit, following the completion of the project. The audit will consist of, at least, the following checks:

- Accounts
- Physical inventory
- Time-sheets and payslips / employee contracts
- Receipts for all equipment and consumables
- Bank statements for the Project Account

7.4 Accountability

The beneficiaries shall keep a separate project bank account and records, clearly distinguishable from their other accounting records. All relevant expenses must be recorded in these accounts. All funding payments by MCST must be deposited in the project bank account.

Eligible expenses must have been determined in accordance with the usual accounting and management principles and practices of the applicant. Direct eligible costs must be backed up with the relevant documentation as specified in the Grant Agreement.

7.5 Supervening Circumstances

The Project Contact Point is obliged to immediately advise MCST of any internal or extraneous significant event which might affect the validity or implementation of the project. This obligation applies to the entire period between the submission of the Project Application and the completion of the project.

MCST, at its own discretion, shall either give such directives as it deems necessary for the furtherance of the project or re-assess the project in its entirety accordingly.

Failure on the part of the Project Contact Point to respect this obligation may lead MCST to suspend or terminate funding for the project and request a refund of funds already paid out.

If during the course of a project a partner withdraws from the Project Consortium, the Applicant will immediately advise MCST. In this event, the relevant articles of the Project Consortium Agreement and the National Grant Agreement shall apply.

7.6 Default

If the implementation of a project becomes impossible or if the Applicant fails to implement it, MCST shall be entitled to collect refunds of money already paid out.

7.7 Interpretation of Rules

This document endeavors to establish comprehensive and unambiguous rules governing participation in this initiative. However, should circumstances arise where the rules are inadequate, unclear, ambiguous or conflicting, MCST shall exercise its discretion in the interpretation of the rules through the setting up of an *ad hoc* committee.

8. Confidentiality of Submissions

Unless otherwise indicated, all project application submissions except for the abstract shall be treated in strict confidence.

The data collected by MCST via the application for the aid and its subsequent processing by MCST to evaluate data subject's request for aid under the Scheme is in line with:

- i. The National Rules for Participation.
- ii. Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 of 17th June 2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty as amended by Commission Regulation (EU) No 2017/1084 of 14 June 2017 amending Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 as regards aid for port and airport infrastructure, notification thresholds for aid for culture and heritage conservation and for aid for sport and multifunctional recreational infrastructures, and regional operating aid schemes for outermost regions and amending Regulation (EU) No 702/2014 as regards the calculation of eligible costs (hereinafter referred to as the 'General Block Exemption Regulations' (for Schemes notified under the General Block Exemption Regulations) (where applicable)
- iii. COMMISSION REGULATION (EU) No 1407/2013 of 18 December 2013 on the application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union to *de minimis* aid (*de minimis* Regulation) (for schemes notified under the *de minimis* Regulation) (where applicable)
- iv. Data Protection Act, Chapter 586 of the Laws of Malta and Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Directive 95/46/EC (General Data Protection Regulation).
- v. The legitimate basis to process personal data submitted by the data subject by virtue of his/her written application for aid is Regulation 6 (1)(b) of the General Data Protection Regulation ("GDPR"), as 'processing is necessary in order to take steps at the request of the data subject prior to entering into a contract'.

Further information may be found within the application form.

