

EIT Water & PDJF Regional WAVEMAKER 2026

Business Creation Award — Open call rules and regulations

Introduction

The 2026 Pilot: EIT Water & PDJF WAVEMAKER Regional Event is a business creation award competition that identifies and supports promising blue economy startups, spinouts, SMEs, and venture teams working on urgent Water, Marine, and Maritime (WMM) challenges. The event functions as a regional feeder event where ventures advance their solutions, compete before a jury, and pitch to a panel of investors.

The Award is aligned with the EIT Water Knowledge and Innovation Community (KIC) and its Business Creation Mechanism (Action Programme 3 — WAVEMAKER), contributing to Strategic Objective 2: Market Deployment. The pilot is financially supported by a philanthropic donation from the Poul Due Jensen Foundation (PDJF) and coordinated by Aarhus University.

Participation is free of charge. By submitting an application and participating in the event, all teams and participants accept these Rules & Regulations in full.

Article 1 — Definitions

For the purposes of this document:

- **Organizer:** Digital Innovation Hub Innovamare (DIH)
- **Award:** The EIT Water & PDJF Regional WAVEMAKER Business Creation Award open call, execution, and final ranking process.
- **Applicant:** a startup, spinout, SME, or venture team submitting an application via the Mairos platform.
- **Team:** a startup, spinout, SME, or group of individuals applying jointly as a venture.
- **Team Leader:** one individual designated by the Team as the single contact point and operational representative.
- **WMM Sector:** Water, Marine, and Maritime sectors and ecosystems.
- **Venture:** the startup, spinout, or SME and its solution advanced by the Team during the Award process.
- **Launch Event:** the EIT Water Launch Event (planned for 15 October 2026), where regional winners pitch for the overall WAVEMAKER title.
- **Coordinators:** EIT Water Head Office, Poul Due Jensen Foundation (PDJF), and Aarhus University.

Article 2 — Objectives and scope

The main objective of the WAVEMAKER pilot is to strengthen the transition of blue economy ventures from early innovation to market readiness.

The Award aims to:

- Activate and engage relevant spinouts, startups, SMEs, and stakeholders (corporates, investors, public authorities, research and education actors) to strengthen market pathways and ecosystem collaboration.
- Support solutions and teams in progressing towards validation and market uptake through mentorship, piloting readiness, market and procurement understanding, and investment readiness.
- Close the gap between research and real-world market impact by supporting entrepreneurship and business creation in the WMM sectors.

The Award functions as a regional feeder event and does not create any procurement obligation for the Organizer, EIT Water, or PDJF to purchase or deploy any developed solution.

Article 3 — Award topics and strategic objectives

The Award is aligned with the following EIT Water Strategic Objectives (SOs):

Topic 1 (SO3): Healthy, clean, productive, and sustainable waters — overcoming marine and freshwater ecosystem degradation and compromised water quality.

Topic 2 (SO4): Water-smart Water, Marine, and Maritime sectors — overcoming limited water efficiency, recycling, and resource circularity.

Topic 3 (SO5): Resilient Water, Marine, and Maritime sectors — increasing resilience to climate-related extreme events and external threats.

Relevant areas include: marine monitoring, smart maritime operations, coastal and water resilience technologies, marine robotics, environmental intelligence, and the circular blue economy. Ventures should demonstrate innovation and clear potential for market deployment and growth.

Article 4 — Eligibility criteria

Eligible applicant types

The Award is open to blue economy ventures from across the ADRION region. Target applicants include:

- Startups and spinouts with a working concept or prototype.
- SMEs with a scalable blue economy solution.
- Venture teams, including student-led ventures and research teams commercialising their work.

If a Team lies on the application or misappropriates another party's idea, it will be disqualified.

Team size and composition

Each Team must consist of a minimum of one (1) member or more. The Organizer will admit a maximum of ten (10) teams to the regional event.

Teams are encouraged to be multidisciplinary, combining technical, environmental, and business expertise. Solutions must be lawful, ethical, and aligned with environmental and data protection standards.

Exclusion and integrity constraints

A Team is not eligible if:

- the application contains false declarations or materially misleading information,
- the proposed solution infringes third-party rights or intentionally misappropriates confidential information (Article 14).

Article 5 — Accessibility, inclusion, and equal treatment

The Award applies a strict equal-treatment principle:

- No discrimination will be tolerated on grounds such as sex, race, colour, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political opinion, minority membership, property, birth, disability, age, or sexual orientation (consistent with EU fundamental rights principles).
- The Organizer encourages gender-balanced and inclusive Teams (encouragement only; not an eligibility condition).

Accessibility commitments (best practice): the Organizer will make reasonable efforts to ensure that application materials are accessible (screen-reader friendly PDFs, structured forms, clear language) and that the event venue provides reasonable accessibility accommodations, aligned with EU public-sector accessibility norms (Directive (EU) 2016/2102) as a best-practice benchmark.

Article 6 — Call publication, communications, and official language

The call opens on 20 July 2026 and closes on 31 August 2026 (noon). Teams register online using the Mairo's platform and upload any required documents. One member is designated Team Leader, who must ensure all team members agree to these rules.

- The call opens: 20 July 2026.
- The official language of the call, submissions, event, and evaluation is English, unless the Organizer publishes an explicit bilingual exception.
- Official communications are those published via the call page on the Mairo's platform.

Article 7 — Application process and required documents

Submission platform and deadline

Applications must be submitted via the Mairo's platform by 31 August 2026, 12:00 (noon) CEST (UTC+2). Late submissions will not be evaluated. The Organizer will update teams by email and the official website. Results of the selection round will be sent start of September 2026.

Application content (minimum required)

Each application must contain the mandatory registration material in English, addressing the following core elements:

- **Strategic Objective Alignment:** identification of which EIT Water Strategic Objective (SO3 - **Healthy, clean, productive, and sustainable waters**, SO4- **Water-smart Water, Marine, and Maritime sectors**, SO5 - **Resilient Water, Marine, and Maritime sectors**) the solution addresses.
- **Venture Profile:** team name, team type (startup, spinout, SME, student-led or research venture), team size, stage (idea, prototype, early revenue, or scaling), and country.
- **Problem Relevance & Clarity:** a clear water, marine, or maritime challenge validated using data, research, or real-world evidence.
- **Innovation & Technical Strength:** the originality of the solution and the application of relevant technologies.
- **Market & Impact Potential:** the value proposition, business model, target users, and evidence of market and sustainability impact.
- **Path to Market:** the expected pathway to deployment and growth after the event.

Unless the Organizer explicitly waives a requirement, Teams must accept:

- eligibility statements, truthfulness, IP rights to use disclosed materials, and acceptance of rules,
- consent to processing of personal data under Article 16,
- where relevant, a state-aid/de minimis declaration if the Team includes an undertaking and later receives award-related support.

Completeness and admissibility check

The Organizer will conduct an administrative check for completeness and basic eligibility. The Organizer may request clarifications; failure to respond within the stated time limit may result in rejection.

Article 8 — Selection process overview

The Award runs in two stages:

Stage 1: Open Call Selection — the Organizer and the Review Panel select eligible ventures from the applications submitted via the platform, admitting a maximum of ten (10) teams to the regional event.

Stage 2: Winner Selection at the Regional Event — following the regional WAVEMAKER event, the appointed judging committee evaluates the final pitches and determines the three (3) best ventures for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place.

Article 9 — Evaluation criteria and scoring

The judging committee evaluates the ventures based on five (5) weighted criteria:

1. **Problem Relevance & Clarity (Weight: 15%)** — a clear WMM challenge demonstrated with data, research, or real-world evidence, with regional and global relevance.
2. **Innovation & Technical Strength (Weight: 20%)** — originality of the solution, application of relevant technologies, and differentiation from existing solutions.
3. **Market & Impact Potential (Weight: 25%)** — potential to improve water, marine, and ecosystem outcomes, alignment with UN SDG 6 and SDG 14, and scalability of impact.
4. **Business Viability & Scalability (Weight: 25%)** — clear value proposition, business model, understanding of target users, feasibility of scaling, and investment readiness.
5. **Execution & Team Capability (Weight: 15%)** — strength and diversity of the team, progress made, and quality and clarity of the pitch presentation.

General scoring method

Each criterion is scored on a 1–10 scale (1 = minimum, 10 = maximum). Scores are weighted and aggregated into a final score out of 100. The final score for each team is the mathematical average of the total scores given by all judges.

Tie-Breaker Rule

In the event of a tie, teams are ranked by: (1) the higher individual score for 'Market & Impact Potential'; (2) if still tied, the higher score for 'Innovation & Technical Strength'; (3) any final unresolved ties are decided solely by the Head Judge.

Article 10 — Timeline and participation conditions

Official timeline and milestones

- Call opens: 20 July 2026
- Application deadline: 20 August 2026 (12:00 CEST)
- Selection results announced: end of August 2026
- Regional WAVEMAKER event: 17 September 2026, ADRIA TECH Technology Park, Šibenik
- EIT Water Launch Event (winner's pitch): 15 October 2026

Participation requirements

Selected Teams must:

- confirm participation by the Organizer's acceptance deadline,
- attend preparation and onboarding sessions (when scheduled),
- comply with the event code of conduct and safety requirements,
- deliver required outputs (Article 17).

If a Team cannot attend the regional event, the Organizer may invite a reserve Team.

Coverage of meals

For participation in the regional event, the Organizer will cover meals on the day of the event for selected Teams. Travel, accommodation, and all other costs are borne by the Teams.

Article 11 — Jury composition, appointment, and decision-making

Jury composition

The evaluation during the regional WAVEMAKER event is conducted by an appointed judging committee of independent specialists representing diverse scientific, environmental, and business areas, including:

- research and scientific institutions,

- water, marine, and maritime industry actors / SMEs,
- public authorities, NGOs, or user organizations,
- business, finance, investment, and innovation support ecosystem actors.

Decisions and appeal

Jury decisions are final and not subject to appeal, except in cases of proven procedural error or proven conflict-of-interest mismanagement. Any official complaint regarding procedural errors must be submitted in writing within 5 calendar days of the results announcement via email to the Organizer — DIH Innovamare (info@innovamare.org). The final determination made by the governing bodies is binding.

Article 12 — Prizes and recognition

Regional awards

The winning ventures selected by the judging committee at the end of the regional WAVEMAKER event will be recognised as WAVEMAKERS. Three (3) winners will receive:

- **1st, 2nd, and 3rd place:** a one-year membership in the EIT Water ecosystem (for 2027).

A representative of the first-place winner will be invited to pitch and receive recognition at the EIT Water Launch Event (planned for 15 October 2026), where an overall WAVEMAKER winner will be selected across all regions.

Overall WAVEMAKER winner

The overall WAVEMAKER winner will receive:

- an additional one-year membership in the EIT Water ecosystem (for 2028), and
- **a monetary award of EUR 5,000**, intended to support further development and market progress.

Terms

The monetary award to the overall winner will be paid via bank transfer to the valid bank account (IBAN) designated by the Team Leader. All awards are subject to national tax regulations and transaction fees, which are the sole responsibility of the recipients.

No automatic investment or procurement rights

Being selected as a winner or receiving recognition or an award does not create any entitlement, automatic guarantee, procurement rights, or commitment by the Organizer, EIT Water, or PDJF to purchase, license, or further fund the developed solutions.

Article 13 — Eligible costs and event coverage

The EIT Water framework covers the operational execution of the regional event at the venue.

- **Eligible covered items:** access to the physical venue, high-speed internet, working infrastructure, meals on the day of the event, and essential event logistics provided by the Organizer on-site.
- **Not covered (participant responsibility):** all individual travel expenses, overnight accommodation, additional meals, per diems, equipment shipping, personal consumables, or insurance are the sole responsibility of the participating teams.

Article 14 — Intellectual property, ownership, and licensing

Ownership of results

Each Team retains full ownership of its solutions, concepts, prototypes, and other intellectual property (IP) generated during the Award. Team members must agree among themselves regarding internal ownership distribution if they represent different organizations.

Background IP

Each Team member retains full ownership of their Background IP (existing IP brought into the event). By participating, Team members grant other members of their own team a limited internal right to use relevant Background IP strictly for Award purposes.

Organizer communication license

By participating, each Team grants the Organizer, EIT Water, and PDJF a non-exclusive, royalty-free license to use the team name, short abstract, non-confidential visuals, and non-confidential pitch materials for communication, dissemination, and reporting related to the WAVEMAKER and the EIT Water framework — including the EIT Water Impact Report data capture. This excludes proprietary technical documentation or trade secrets unless Teams explicitly authorize it in writing.

Third-party rights warranty

Teams warrant that their submissions and results do not knowingly infringe third-party IP rights. The Organizer is not liable for IP disputes among Teams or with third parties.

Article 15 — Confidentiality and publication

Teams decide what project details to share. Confidential material may be submitted behind closed doors (and Teams may consider an NDA or patent). Information disclosed in a public pitch may be seen by others.

- Teams control what they disclose publicly.
- If Teams present in public sessions, disclosure is at their discretion.
- Participants must not disclose confidential information obtained from other Teams, mentors, jurors, or organizers for 12 months after the event, unless written consent is granted.

Article 16 — Data protection, media, and recordkeeping

The Award complies with the GDPR: personal data (from applications or event media) will only be used to administer the WAVEMAKER, communicate with teams, and report to EIT Water and PDJF. Data will be kept secure.

Purposes of processing

Personal data collected through applications and participation will be processed for organizing and administering the Award; eligibility checks and evaluation; communications and event logistics; dissemination and reporting obligations under the EIT Water framework and PDJF; and security and compliance.

Data controller

The Organizer, alongside the EIT Water coordinating management entity, acts as the data controller for personal data collected through the submission platform and during the event. Queries about personal data processing can be directed to info@innovamare.org.

Lawful basis

Personal data will be processed on the basis of: performance of a task carried out in the public interest; legitimate interests of the Organizer (vetting applications, event logistics, security, photography, and publicity); and consent of team members for specific processing (e.g., use of images in promotional media).

Data categories and recipients

Data may include team members' names, contact details, affiliations, role, nationality, and submitted text/images (concept notes, slide decks), as well as photos/videos taken at events. Data will be stored securely and shared only with authorized institutional partners, evaluators, and auditors, all bound by confidentiality obligations.

Data subject rights

Every individual whose personal data are processed has the right to access, rectification, erasure ('the right to be forgotten'), restriction or objection to processing, data portability (where applicable), and to lodge a complaint with a supervisory authority. Data subjects may exercise these rights by contacting the data controller (info@innovamare.org).

Photo/video consent

By participating in the WAVEMAKER and related official events, participants grant the Organizer, EIT Water, and PDJF the right to record, photograph, and use their image and voice in media formats for promotion and project communication without compensation, unless a participant opts out in writing before the event.

Article 17 — Reporting, monitoring, and deliverables

Stage 1 deliverables (application stage)

Deliverables consist of the successfully submitted application fields, venture profiles, and compliance declarations submitted via the Mairos platform.

Regional event deliverables (minimum set)

Each selected Team participating in the regional event must produce and submit, at minimum:

- **A Pitch Deck:** formatted for the final judging panel and investor presentation.
- **Venture summary:** outlining the WMM challenge, the solution, business model, and path to market.

Winner deliverables

Winning teams must participate in EIT Water/PDJF dissemination requests (e.g., success-story interviews, impact-tracking inputs), subject to reasonable confidentiality constraints. Failure to cooperate with required post-event reporting may result in withholding of recognition or, for the overall winner, the monetary award.

Article 18 — Ethics, integrity, and conduct

- **Professional behaviour:** participants must behave professionally, ethically, and respectfully. Harassment, hate speech, discrimination, or intimidation will result in immediate disqualification and removal from the venue and competition, aligned with EU fundamental rights and EIT Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) principles.
- **Legal compliance:** Teams must comply with all applicable national and international laws, including data protection regulations, environmental protection standards, and sector-specific maritime/water rules relevant to their solution.

Article 19 — Publicity, branding, and acknowledgement of funding

Because the Award is implemented under the EIT Water pilot framework and co-funded by the Poul Due Jensen Foundation (PDJF), Teams (especially winners during public dissemination) must comply with the official branding rules communicated by the Organizer.

- **Logo and funding statement:** use the correct EIT and PDJF project logos and the required funding statement where instructed. Branding assets must be displayed as an invariable unit as provided in the onboarding templates.
- **Emblem rules:** the funding statement acknowledging EIT and PDJF support must be spelled out clearly, and its use must not imply institutional endorsement or direct official affiliation.

Article 20 — Risk management, liability, force majeure, and termination

Risk and liability allocation

- Participants are solely responsible for their own equipment, software, and safe conduct during physical and digital events.
- Participants are responsible for their own travel documents (passports, visas, medical insurance) required to attend the event.

The Organizer, EIT Water, and PDJF are not liable for loss, theft, or damage to participant property or hardware; indirect damages, including lost profits or reputational harm; or internal disputes or IP disagreements between members of the same Team.

Force majeure

The Organizer reserves the right to modify dates, format (e.g., switching to an online setup), or the overall scope of the event — including complete cancellation — in case of force majeure or circumstances beyond its reasonable control.

Termination / disqualification

The Organizer may disqualify a Team or terminate their participation and award eligibility if eligibility conditions are no longer met; a serious breach of these rules or the code of conduct occurs; fraud, misrepresentation, plagiarism, or third-party IP infringement is identified; or a winning team fails to provide valid banking details or required declarations.

Article 21 — Legal terms and dispute resolution

Applicable law and jurisdiction

- **Governing law:** the national law of the country where the local Organizer executing the regional event is established (Croatia).
- **Jurisdiction:** the competent courts of the local Organizer's seat.

Dispute resolution ladder

6. Good-faith negotiation: written notice submitted to the Organizer, allowing fifteen (15) calendar days for direct resolution.
7. Escalation: to the Organizer's designated dispute officer or EIT Water framework management.
8. Litigation: if unresolved through amicable tracks, litigation shall be brought before the competent court of the Organizer's seat.

Article 22 — Amendments and final provisions

The Organizer reserves the right to issue necessary amendments to these Rules & Regulations. Amendments take immediate effect upon publication on the platform or direct email notification. Continued participation in the WAVEMAKER constitutes explicit acceptance of the updated terms. Participants who do not accept the amendments must formally withdraw from the competition.

Legal representative for LP, DIH Innovamare
Mateo Ivanac