

EIT Water & PDJF Regional HACKATHON 2026

Open call rules and regulations

Version 2, October 2026. Scope extended with an Open Blue Innovation Category (Articles 1, 3, 4, 7 and 9).

Introduction

The 2026 Pilot: EIT Water & PDJF HACKATHON Regional Event is an open innovation competition that connects multidisciplinary teams to develop early-stage solutions for urgent Water, Marine, and Maritime (WMM) challenges. The event functions as a fast-track innovation engine where participants work together across borders to turn real-world problems into innovative Proofs of Concept (PoCs).

The Challenge is aligned with the EIT Water Knowledge and Innovation Community (KIC) and its Open Innovation Booster programme. 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 and University of Zadar (UNIZD)
- **Challenge:** The EIT Water & PDJF Regional HACKATHON open call, execution, and final ranking process.
- **Applicant:** a team submitting an application via Mairos platform.
- **Team:** a group of individuals applying jointly. A startup, spinout, or SME may also apply as a Team.
- **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.
- **Priority Water Challenges:** the three Hackathon focus areas defined in Article 3.
- **Open Blue Innovation Category:** the open category defined in Article 3 for solutions addressing other Water, Marine, and Maritime challenges.
- **Proof of Concept (PoC):** The early-stage solution direction, model, or prototype developed by teams during the event.
- **Coordinators:** EIT Water Head Office, Poul Due Jensen Foundation (PDJF), and Aarhus University.

Article 2 - Objectives and scope

The main objective of the HACKATHON pilot is to accelerate early-stage solution development for urgent Water, Marine, and Maritime (WMM) challenges.

The Challenge aims to:

- Mobilize collaboration across different sectors and countries to generate actionable solution directions and Proofs of Concept (PoCs).
- Bring together diverse stakeholders such as startups, SMEs, solution owners, academics, young entrepreneurs, and RDI teams.
- Close the gap between research and real-world impact by supporting innovation in new technological solutions and entrepreneurship.

The Challenge functions as a fast-track innovation engine and does not create any procurement obligation for the Organizer, EIT Water, or PDJF to purchase or deploy any developed solution.

Article 3 - Challenge topics and strategic objectives

The Challenge is problem-driven and focuses on 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.

Specific problem areas include: ocean pollution, marine biodiversity loss, shipping emissions, coastal resilience, and port efficiency. Teams must focus on novelty and propose solutions with potential for future development.

Categories of participation

Teams apply in one of two categories:

- **Priority Water Challenges:** solutions addressing one of the three Hackathon focus areas: Leakage Detection and Non-Revenue Water Reduction; Freshwater Monitoring and Environmental Intelligence; or Predictive Maintenance and Smart Infrastructure Inspection.
- **Open Blue Innovation Category:** solutions addressing any other Water, Marine, or Maritime challenge aligned with Topic 1 (SO3), Topic 2 (SO4), or Topic 3 (SO5). Relevant areas include marine monitoring, smart maritime operations, coastal and water resilience technologies, marine robotics, environmental intelligence, and the circular blue economy.

The Open Blue Innovation Category is open to early-stage concepts as well as to startups, spinouts, SMEs, and venture teams with an existing solution, prototype, or product. Such Teams use the Hackathon to further develop, adapt, or validate their solution and must demonstrate the progress made during the event (Article 17).

Both categories are subject to the same eligibility conditions, evaluation criteria (Article 9), jury (Article 11), and prizes (Article 12). All Teams are ranked together in a single ranking.

Article 4 - Eligibility criteria

Eligible applicant types

The Challenge is open to cross-sector and cross-country teams. Target participants include:

- Young entrepreneurs, innovators, and technology developers.
- Startups, spinouts, and SMEs, including ventures with an existing solution, prototype, or product.
- Academics, researchers, and RDI teams in relevant fields.

If a team lies on the application or steals someone's idea, they will be disqualified.

Team size and composition rules

- The event will host a minimum of 30 participants across at least 6 teams.
- Teams should be multidisciplinary, combining technical, environmental, or 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 Challenge applies a strict equal-treatment principle:

- No discrimination will be tolerated on grounds such as sex, race, color, 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 event venues provide reasonable accessibility accommodations. This aligns with EU public-sector accessibility norms (Directive (EU) 2016/2102) as a best-practice benchmark for public-facing digital services. Applicants will have organized accommodations by project partners.

Article 6 - Call publication, communications, and official language

The call opens on August 25, 2026 and closes on **October 15, 2026** (23:59). Teams register online (using Mairos) and upload any required documents. One member is the Team Leader, who must ensure all team members agree to the rules.

- The call opens: 25 August 2026.
- The official language of the call, submissions, hackathons, and evaluation is English, unless the Organizer publishes an explicit bilingual exception.
- Official communications are those published via the call page on the Mairos platform.

Article 7 - Application process and required documents

Submission platform and deadline

Applications must be submitted via the MAIROS platform by:

- **15 October 2026, 23:59 CEST (UTC+2).**

Late submissions will not be evaluated. The organizers will update teams by email and the official website. Results of the selection round (who goes to hackathons) will be sent **from late October 2026 (exact date to be confirmed)**.

Application content (minimum required)

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

- **Category:** Indication of whether the Team applies under one of the Priority Water Challenges (stating the focus area) or under the Open Blue Innovation Category (Article 3).
- **Strategic Objective Alignment:** Identification of which EIT Water Strategic Objective — Topic 1 (SO3), Topic 2 (SO4), or Topic 3 (SO5) — the solution addresses.
- **Problem Relevance & Clarity:** A clear water, marine, or maritime challenge validated using data, research, or real-world evidence.
- **Innovation & Technical Strength:** Description of the originality of the solution and the application of relevant technologies (such as IoT sensors, AI, satellite data, robotics, or water treatment).
- **Impact Potential:** Evidence of how the solution can improve water quality, ocean health, or lower emissions, including alignment with UN SDG 6 and SDG 14.
- **Business Viability & Scalability:** The value proposition, business model, and understanding of target users (e.g., ports, shipping companies, municipalities, NGOs, coastal industries).
- **Team Capability:** Demonstration of a diverse team combining technical, environmental, and business expertise.

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 15,

- where relevant, state-aid/de minimis declaration if the Team includes an undertaking and later receives the Champion support package (Article 13).
- Team member inclusion of personal data in the application.

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 Challenge runs in two stages:

Stage 1: Open Call Selection for the Hackathon — The Organizer and the Review Panel select eligible teams from the applications submitted via the platform. The selection aims to populate the regional event with a minimum field of 30 participants across at least 6 competing teams.

Stage 2: Winner Selection at the Hackathon — Following the implementation of the one-day regional hackathon event, the appointed judging committee evaluates the final deliverables and pitches. The judges rank and determine the three (3) best concepts for the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place financial awards.

Article 9 - Evaluation criteria and scoring

The judging committee evaluates the teams based on five weighted criteria. Each criterion is scored on a scale from 0 to 5 and weighted according to the percentages indicated below.

1. Problem Relevance & Clarity (Weight: 15%)

- Clearly defines a specific challenge connected to one or more of the Hackathon focus areas (Leakage Detection and Non-Revenue Water Reduction; Freshwater Monitoring and Environmental Intelligence; or Predictive Maintenance and Smart Infrastructure Inspection) or, for Teams in the Open Blue Innovation Category, a specific Water, Marine, or Maritime challenge aligned with SO3, SO4, or SO5.
- Demonstrates a clear understanding of the operational needs and challenges faced by relevant end users, including water utilities, municipalities, environmental agencies, public authorities, infrastructure operators, ports, marinas, maritime operators and coastal industries.
- Supports the problem definition with relevant data, research findings, stakeholder input or other real-world evidence.
- Explains why existing solutions or approaches are insufficient and clearly identifies the users, communities, organisations or ecosystems affected by the problem.
- Demonstrates alignment with relevant EIT Water strategic objectives and explains the challenge's relevance for the ADRION region and the wider European water, marine, and maritime sectors.

2. Innovation & Technical Strength (Weight: 20%)

- Originality and creativity of the solution.
- Application of relevant technologies (e.g., IoT sensors, AI, satellite data, robotics, water treatment, sustainable materials).
- Differentiation from existing marine or water solutions and potential intellectual property.

3. Impact Potential (Water, Marine & Sustainability) (Weight: 25%)

- Demonstrates measurable potential to improve water efficiency, reduce water losses and operational costs, strengthen freshwater monitoring, protect ecosystem health or increase the resilience of water infrastructure. Teams in the Open Blue Innovation Category demonstrate measurable potential to improve marine, coastal, or freshwater ecosystem health, reduce pollution or emissions, or increase the efficiency and resilience of the Water, Marine, and Maritime sectors.
- Clearly identifies the expected environmental, social, economic and operational benefits of the proposed solution.
- Defines appropriate indicators through which the expected impact and performance of the solution could be measured.

- Demonstrates alignment with relevant EIT Water strategic objectives and the UN Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 6 – Clean Water and Sanitation and SDG 14 – Life Below Water, as well as other relevant sustainability and climate objectives.
- Shows potential for continued development after the Hackathon through end-user validation, mentoring, Living Lab testing, pilot implementation, partnerships, incubation or access to further funding.
- Demonstrates the potential for the solution and its impact to be replicated or transferred across different water utilities, municipalities, regions, or water-management and blue economy contexts.

4. Business Viability & Scalability (Weight: 25%)

- Presents a clear value proposition and explains how the solution responds to the needs of its target users, such as water utilities, municipalities, environmental agencies, public authorities, infrastructure operators, ports, marinas, maritime operators and coastal industries.
- Describes a credible business, service-delivery or public-sector uptake model, including who would use, purchase, finance, operate or maintain the proposed solution.
- Demonstrates the technical and operational feasibility of the solution, including the required data, technologies, infrastructure, expertise and resources.
- Presents a realistic implementation pathway from the Hackathon concept or Proof of Concept to validation, pilot testing, deployment or market and public-sector uptake.
- Identifies key technical, financial, organisational and market risks and proposes realistic mitigation measures.
- Explains the solution's competitive advantage and its potential to be scaled, replicated or adapted across different organisations, territories, and water-management or maritime systems.
- Addresses relevant regulatory, procurement, data-protection, interoperability, environmental and industry-standard requirements that could affect implementation or deployment.

5. Execution & Team Capability (Weight: 15%)

- Strength and diversity of team expertise and progress made during the HACKATHON.
- Quality, clarity, and storytelling of the pitch presentation, and feasibility of real-world implementation.

General scoring method

Each criterion is scored on a 0–5 scale, where: 0 = not addressed / non-compliant; 1 = very weak; 2 = weak; 3 = satisfactory; 4 = strong; 5 = excellent / best practice evidence. 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 that the final aggregated scores of two or more teams are tied, the teams will be ranked based on the following sequential hierarchy: (1) the candidate with the higher individual score for 'Impact Potential' will be ranked higher; (2) if still tied, the candidate with the higher individual score for 'Innovation and Technical Strength' will be ranked higher; (3) any final unresolved ties will be decided solely by the Head Judge.

Article 10 - Timeline, hackathons, and participation conditions

Official timeline and milestones

- Call opens: 25 August 2026
- Application deadline: **15 October 2026 (23:59 CEST)**
- Selection results announced: **from late October 2026 (exact date to be confirmed)**
- Hackathon finale: **5 November 2026 in Zadar**

Hackathon participation requirements

Selected Teams must:

- confirm participation by the Organizer's acceptance deadline,
- attend hackathon onboarding sessions (when scheduled),
- comply with the event code of conduct and safety requirements,

- deliver required outputs (Article 17).

If a Team cannot attend its allocated hackathon, the Organizer may invite a reserve Team.

Coverage of accommodation and meals

As the regional hackathon is delivered as a one-day, in-person event, no accommodation is provided or required. For participation on the day, the Organizer will provide free catering (refreshments and meals) for all selected Teams for the duration of the event. Travel and all other costs remain the sole responsibility of the Teams.

Article 11 - Jury Composition, Appointment, and Decision-Making

Jury Composition

The evaluation during the regional HACKATHON is conducted by an appointed judging committee consisting of independent specialists representing diverse scientific, environmental, and business areas. The jury includes members representing:

- Research and scientific institutions.
- Water, marine, and maritime industry actors / SMEs.
- Public authorities, NGOs, or user organizations.
- Business, finance, and innovation support ecosystem actors.

Decisions and Appeal

- **Finality of Decisions:** Jury decisions are final and not subject to appeal, except in cases of proven procedural error or proven conflict-of-interest mismanagement.
- **Complaint Procedure:** 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 Financial Awards

Financial Awards

The winning teams selected by the judging committee at the end of the regional HACKATHON will receive direct financial cash prizes integrated into the event framework. Three (3) winners will receive:

- **1st Place Winner:** 3,000 EUR cash prize — 1,000 EUR EIT Water and 2,000 EUR sponsors
- **2nd Place Winner:** 1,500 EUR cash prize — 500 EUR EIT Water and 1,000 EUR sponsors
- **3rd Place Winner:** 750 EUR cash prize — 250 EUR EIT Water and 500 EUR sponsors

Terms of Payment

- **Cash Transfer:** Prizes will be paid via bank transfer to the valid bank account (IBAN) designated by the Team Leader. No in-kind or service alternatives are substituted for these baseline awards.
- **Taxes and Fees:** All cash prizes 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 a financial award does not create any entitlement, automatic guarantee, procurement rights, or commitment by the Organizer, EIT Water, or the Poul Due Jensen Foundation (PDJF) to purchase, license, or further fund the developed solutions.

Article 13 - Eligible Costs and Event Coverage

Hackathon Cost Coverage Rules

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, and essential event logistics provided by the Organizer on-site.

- **Not Covered (Participant Responsibility):** All individual travel expenses, overnight accommodations, dinners, per diems, additional nights, 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 any solutions, concepts, Proofs of Concept (PoCs), prototypes, and other intellectual property (IP) results generated during the Challenge. Team members must agree among themselves regarding internal ownership distribution if they represent different organizations.

Limited Publicity License

By participating, teams grant the Organizer, EIT Water, and PDJF a limited right to use simple project information (such as team name, solution summary, and event photography/video) strictly for publicity, promotional purposes, and official reporting. The Organizer cannot claim the team's detailed technical work, code, or internal know-how.

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 Challenge purposes during the event.

Organizer communication license

To support project dissemination, each Team grants the Organizer, EIT Water, and the Poul Due Jensen Foundation (PDJF) a non-exclusive, royalty-free license to use team name, short abstract, non-confidential visuals, and non-confidential pitch materials for communication, dissemination, and reporting activities related directly to the HACKATHON and the EIT Water framework. This license excludes the transfer of 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. If a team wants to keep something secret, they can submit it behind closed doors (and consider an NDA or patent). But if they publicly pitch an idea, that information can be seen by others. Participants must not disclose confidential information obtained from other Teams, mentors, jurors, or organizers for 12 months after the relevant event, unless written consent is granted.

- Teams control what they disclose publicly.
- If Teams present in public sessions, disclosure is at their discretion.

Article 16 - Data protection, media, and recordkeeping

The rules affirm compliance with GDPR: personal data (from applications or event media) will only be used to promote the event, communicate with teams, and report to the EU. It will be kept safe. Teams agree that photos or videos taken at the event can be used by the organizers for promotion.

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. All queries about personal data processing can be directed to the official project contact route designated by the Organizer (info@innovamare.org).

Data subject rights

Every individual whose personal data is processed has the right to access their data, request rectification, request erasure, restrict or object to processing, request data portability where applicable, and lodge a complaint with a supervisory authority. Participants may exercise these rights by contacting info@innovamare.org.

Photo/video consent

By participating in hackathons and related events, participants grant the Organizer the right to record and use photos/videos 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, team profiles, and compliance declarations submitted via the designated platform.

Hackathon Deliverables (Minimum Set)

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

- **A Concept Note:** Outlining the water/marine challenge and the proposed solution.
- **A Pitch Deck:** Formatted for the final judging panel presentation.
- **A Proof of Concept (PoC) / Demo:** Or equivalent evidence of solution progress developed during the HACKATHON, where applicable.

Winner Deliverables

Winning teams receiving the financial awards must participate in EIT Water/PDJF dissemination requests (e.g., success story interviews, impact tracking inputs), subject to reasonable confidentiality constraints. Failure to cooperate or deliver required post-event reporting inputs may result in the termination or withholding of the financial award transfer.

Article 18 - Ethics, Integrity, and Conduct

- **Professional Behavior:** 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 strictly 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 Challenge is implemented under the EIT Water pilot framework and co-funded by the Poul Due Jensen Foundation (PDJF), Teams (especially winners during public dissemination activities) 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. The branding visual 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 any participant property or hardware; indirect damages, including lost profits or reputational harm; or any 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, extreme weather affecting marine operations, or circumstances entirely 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 established 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 institutional 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 hackathon is established.
- **Jurisdiction:** The competent courts of the local Organizer's seat.

Dispute Resolution Ladder

1. Good-Faith Negotiation: written notice submitted to the Organizer, allowing fifteen (15) calendar days for direct resolution. 2. Escalation to the Organizer's designated dispute officer or EIT Water framework management. 3. Litigation before the competent court of the Organizer's seat if unresolved through amicable tracks.

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 HACKATHON 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

Šibenik, [DATE]