

INDUSTRY-LED AWARDS CALL 2024 - TERMS OF REFERENCE

Research Programme:	Marine Research Programme
Call Type:	Open Call for SME-led Research

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

[Impact 2030: Ireland's Research and Innovation Strategy](#) aims to increase Enterprise-led research, development and innovation drive start-ups, competitiveness, productivity and high performance in the Irish economy, enabling the business sector to contribute to Ireland's economic and societal resilience and transformation.

In Ireland the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act of 2015 (as amended) and its climate action plan includes targets that will require a rapid transition towards a climate neutral and sustainable blue economy (in line with the EU Green Deal).

With small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) generating around 40% of business-sector greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, there can be no net zero without SMEs. Equally, SMEs, start-ups and the entrepreneurs behind them, are important drivers of the many innovations that can advance sustainable development and the green transition.¹

The green digital transition creates both opportunities and challenges for small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Digitalisation can open-up new business opportunities by enabling low-carbon and circular business models, such as a sharing economy and online markets for second-hand or repaired products, and improving product life-cycle traceability. However, SMEs often face barriers to the adoption of green and digital technologies, such as lack of skills and access to finance.²

It can be difficult for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) to incorporate sustainability into their supply chain management. After the Covid-19 pandemic, digital innovations are being made and many big companies have applied blockchain technology to track the sustainability of their supply chains, while others are using artificial intelligence and machine learning to analyse sustainability data and identify areas for improvement.³ There are opportunities for Irish-based SMEs to adopt the use of these digital tools to create more sustainable ocean economy.

¹ <https://www.oecd-events.org/cop28/session/a767a791-fb6c-ee11-a532-6045bd8ead8a/no-net-zero-without-smes-accelerating-the-green-transition-of-smes>

² [OECD Platform on Financing SMEs for Sustainability - OECD](#)

³ <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2023.2298215>

CALL AIMS AND RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The funding is aimed at supporting research and innovation costs for the development of innovative technologies, products and services from existing or new marine-based business. Applicants should focus on *sustainable development, protection of the environment* and advancing towards a *climate neutral ocean economy*.

The Marine Institute invites proposals under this competitive call which should:

- Provide a full description of the proposed research.
- Convincingly demonstrate how the research meets the SMEs objectives and national marine policy objectives.
- Show value for money.
- Clearly describe the benefit of research to the current and potential future activities of the applicant, and potential benefit to the Irish research and innovation community.
- Include a description of how the proposed research will increase SME skills development/training, research capacity or capability to enter new markets, or national/international research collaboration.

The scope of this call is restricted to five research themes as follows:

1. Coastal and Marine Tourism
2. Maritime Security and Safety
3. Maritime Transport – Ports and Shipping
4. Offshore Renewable Energy
5. Sustainable Seafood (lower impact fisheries, regenerative aquaculture, seafood processing & waste streams)

The proposed research topic must address at least one of the above five themes, but can also combine two themes e.g. the co-location of aquaculture/fisheries with offshore wind installations (under themes 4 and 5).

Applicants should demonstrate that their proposed research will advance new technologies, products and processes that help the transition of these maritime sectors towards sustainable, efficient, low impact activities, operations and business models.

The proposed research and innovation project must be consistent with the aims and objectives of this call. The proposal should be novel and not correspond with ongoing or completed projects funded by other schemes, programmes or projects.

Note: Applicants must detail any other state-aid funding in their application form.

DELIVERABLES AND INTENDED IMPACT

The Industry-Led call is intended to address a need in the Irish SME sector for funding supports to participate in marine-related research.

It is intended that the research should benefit both the applicant and the Irish marine research and innovation community as a whole, and make a measurable impact on the success of the applicant's activities as measured through research output, the development of new capacity to increase innovation and the leveraging of future funding.

The research should increase the Technology Readiness Level (TRL as per diagram below), e.g. sensor technology tested in lab by company, then deployed at sea for trial and demo conducted for a period on time to confirm reliable operation in-situ in different weather conditions (from TRL 4 to 6).

TECHNOLOGY READINESS LEVEL (TRL)



Progress reports and a final report will be required to be submitted.

Previously funded industry-led awards made a significant impact within the marine sector by delivering outputs which included new products or product components, new processes, new technologies, and industrially relevant knowledge or information.

CALL BUDGET

The amount of funding available is shown in the table below. The total funding available in this call is €2.4 million.

Duration	Partners	Max Grant-Aid Requested
18 or 24 months	Two max (Industry only)	200,000 Euro
36 months	Two max (Industry only)	300,000 Euro
36 months	Three max (Two Industry plus one Higher Education Institute or Public Research Performing Organisation)	450,000 Euro (300,000 Euro Industry and 150,000 Euro HEI or Public RPO)

The project must be led by an SME or other eligible commercial entity, but academic partners can be involved under option 3. The consortium size is a maximum of three partners. Sub-contractors may be included in addition to partners, but there is a limit of 20% of the grant-aid allowed for sub-contracting costs (please refer to the Guidelines for Applicants).

The project costs for proposals must be justified and represent value for money given the project goals and taking into account the eligibility criteria in the Guidelines.

It is anticipated that this funding would cover costs for a full/part-time researcher (depending on the duration) or a full-time Masters/PhD student.

In addition, the funding will cover travel, consumables and other costs, as detailed in the Guidelines for Applicants. The allowable overheads are 30% excluding sub-contracts

APPLICATION PROCESS AND KEY DATES

Applications must be made through the Marine Institute's online research grant management system [RIMS](#) (please refer to the Guidelines for Applicants).

The Marine Institute will aim to answer any queries or provide clarifications in relation to the call and application process, and potential applicants should email funding@marine.ie to submit their queries or clarifications.

The application closing date will be **Friday, 16th August 2024**. Applications will be reviewed by international/national experts and scored on the criteria as stated in the Guidelines for Applicants, particularly novel and excellent research, impact and strength of the proposed team.

Important Dates:

<i>Call opening:</i>	20 June 2024
<i>Information Sessions:</i>	26 June 2024 and 11 July 2024
<i>Closing date for applications:</i>	16 August 2024
<i>Expected announcement of results:</i>	Early November 2024
<i>Expected start date:</i>	December 2024/January 2025

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION/REFERENCE MATERIALS

- [Impact 2030 - Ireland's Research and Innovation Strategy](#) Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (2022).
- [European Green Deal](#)
- Setyaningsih, S., Widjojo, R., & Kelle, P. (2024). Challenges and opportunities in sustainability reporting: a focus on small and medium enterprises (SMEs). *Cogent Business & Management*, 11(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2023.2298215>
- [SME activity report 2024-final.pdf \(oecd.org\)](#)