

ANNUAL PLAN 2024

BLUE ECONOMY WORKING GROUP

NATURAL RESOURCES & FOOD CLUSTER

WORKING GROUP LEADERS

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OBJECTIVES

The Working Group focuses on the blue economy, covering research, innovation and policy initiatives in marine, maritime and water systems with the intention to support members' activities within these fields. Sustainability, economic development, climate adaptation and digital challenges related to the ocean, seas and water sectors are key issues for the Working Group. The group aims to foster participation in European funding programmes and initiatives and to build partnerships between members.

CONTEXT

The long-term priority for the WG is the EU Mission Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030 (Ocean and Waters Mission). The Blue Economy Working Group has followed the Ocean and Waters Mission for several years by organising information sessions and dialogues with the Mission Secretariat, providing input to the development and implementation of the Mission, and organising exchanges of experiences and best practices between ERRIN members. The Working Group will, therefore, continue following the Mission in 2024, focusing on links between the Mission and macro-regional strategies and the role of regions in the Mission.

Key EU-level priorities, strategies, events, work programmes and priority calls for proposals that the Working Group aims to follow up in 2024:

Horizon Europe Programme:

- EU Mission Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030
 - Links to macro-regional strategies
 - The role of and opportunities for regions in the Mission
 - Continue the dialogue with the Mission Secretariat

- European Partnerships
 - Zero-Emission Waterborne Transport Partnership
 - Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership
 - Water4All Partnership
- Future KIC on Water, Marine and Maritime Sectors and Ecosystems (WMM)
- S3 Partnerships
 - Water Smart Territories Partnership
 - Maritime Sustainable Blue Bioeconomy
- EU Water Resilience Strategy (expected in Q1 2024)
- Nature Restoration Law
- New EU Commission 2024-2029 and the new Framework Programme (FP10)

OPPORTUNITIES AND OUTPUTS IN ERRIN PROJECTS

Mission Implementation Platform (MIP Ocean): The project managing the Mission Ocean and Waters service portal - the one-stop shop for stakeholders involved and interested in the Ocean and Waters Mission implementation. ERRIN has a small role in the project.

- The Blue Economy Working Group will continue following the services and activities offered to regions by the Implementation Platform while also influencing this offer through dialogues with the Mission Secretariat and the platform.

ACTIVITIES

Introduction to a future KIC on Water, Marine and Maritime Sectors and Ecosystems

Date: 5 February

The European Commission conducted during autumn 2023 a study to collect interest for a future Knowledge and Innovation Community (KIC) on Water, Marine and Maritime Sectors and Ecosystems, and the exact scope of such a KIC, as this still remains unclear. Based on the outcomes of the study, the call for the future KIC is expected to be launched in the first quarter of 2025.

Several actors are currently scoping potential consortia for the call and working on finding business models for the potential future KIC. This Working Group meeting aims to, therefore, inform regional stakeholders of the progress in establishing the KIC, while also diving into the general governance, mission and activities of the KICs. Early ideas on the scope and focus of the future KIC on ocean and waters will also be presented.

Natural Resources and Food Cluster: Breakfast kick-off meeting

Date: 9 February

Cluster Activity: with the Bioeconomy WG and Climate Adaptation TF

This informal coffee meeting will offer an opportunity for all ERRIN members of the Natural Resources and Food Cluster to network and jointly kick off the activities of the Bioeconomy Working Group, the Blue Economy Working Group and the Adaptation Task Force for 2024. The Working Group and the Task Force leaders will present the annual work plans for 2024, providing an opportunity for members to familiarise themselves with the planned activities and discuss their potential involvement in the planned work.

Furthermore, the ERRIN Secretariat will present the new ERRIN project development tool and updates on implementing the EU Missions of interest to this cluster: the Soil Mission, the Ocean and Waters Mission and the Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change.

Site visit to the BIGH Aquaponic Farm

Date: May

In the face of rapid urban expansion, ensuring a sustainable food supply for urban populations has become a pressing concern. Innovative, ultra-local, and sustainable production solutions, such as urban farms, are emerging to respond to this challenge in major cities.

The Blue Economy WG plans to organise a site visit to the BIG H (BIGH) Aquaponic Farm in Brussels. BIGH is a pioneering aquaponic farm dedicated to the principles of sustainability, aquaponic production and the diligent reuse of energy resources, organic matter and materials to minimise waste. Since 2018, BIGH has been supplying products to markets within the Brussels region.

ERRIN members will enjoy a one-hour tour of the Brussels Aquaponics Farm to learn about the history of the site and the project while also touring the outdoor garden, the greenhouses and the fish farm - all with a fantastic view of Brussels.

Nature restoration of marine ecosystems and rivers

Date: October

With the Nature Restoration Law being adopted last year, 2024 will hopefully mark the start of the discussions and early implementation of the targets. Several of the Nature Restoration Law's targets relate to oceans, seas, rivers and water.

This Blue Economy Working Group meeting will help members understand the aspects of the law related to marine ecosystems and rivers, how these will impact regional authorities and their ecosystems, and where local authorities can look for financing to fund new activities. The meeting will also examine the connection between the Nature Restoration Law and EU R&I initiatives, particularly the Ocean and Waters Mission, and its offers, such as technical assistance and Blue Parks.

The meeting aims to prepare members to better handle any new obligations related to the law, as well as to identify funding and financing opportunities at an early stage.

Synergies between the Ocean and Waters Mission and macro-regional strategies

Date: November

Macro regions are closely connected areas facing common needs and challenges, like pollution, climate change or lack of connectivity. The macro-regional strategies aim to coordinate joint policies and actions across borders, sectors and governance levels. They serve as open and agile platforms for strategic networking in different themes and help define concrete work plans that shape cooperation on the ground, contributing to achieving common economic, social, and territorial goals. The EU currently has four macro-regional strategies – The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (2009), the Danube Region (2010), the Adriatic and Ionian Region (2014) and the Alpine Region (2015). The first three cover sea and river basins also dealt with in the Ocean and Waters Mission.

This Blue Economy Working Group meeting aims to discuss synergies between the Ocean and Waters Mission and macro-regional strategies and reflect on bringing them closer together with speakers from DG REGIO and DG RTD. The EU macro-regional strategies have been running for several years, and the cooperation has been strengthened via many common projects, such as water protection. With this in mind, this meeting wants to explore how this cooperation model could be used in the Ocean and Waters Mission context and how macro-regional strategies can tap into the financial potential of Horizon Europe. Furthermore, the meeting will offer an opportunity for an informal exchange between members on stakeholder engagement in the Mission.

Issues/topics to be monitored further:

- ERRIN members' interests in the Ocean and Waters Mission calls for 2024 will be monitored through ERRIN's project development tool, and project facilitation opportunities may be set up either on an ad hoc basis or as a joint Natural Resources and Food cluster project facilitation session in April
- The new European Commission and the next Framework Programme (FP10)
- Relevant European Partnerships, with a focus on Water4All where ERRIN is represented in the Advisory Board, as well as relevant S3 Partnerships
- The EU Water Resilience Strategy and activities linked to it