2B-BLUE | Interreg Euro-MED | Co-funded by the European Union

PUBLIC NOTICE

FOR THE EXPRESSION OF INTEREST FOR THE PARTICIPATION IN A JOINT RESEARCH ACTIVITIES UNDER THE PROJECT 2B-BLUE

PART I – RATIONAL AND CONTEXT OF THE SELECTION OF THE PARTNERS FOR THE JOINT RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

1. Introducing the Project 2B-BLUE

The 2B-BLUE project is designed to accelerate the adoption and transfer of Blue Biotechnology (BBt) solutions across the Mediterranean, ensuring that innovations can be transferred effectively from research to industry. Recognizing the sector's vast potential in areas, such as marine bioremediation, sustainable aquaculture, bio-based industries, and carbon sequestration; the project addresses the key barriers that have historically slowed the integration of BBt into blue economy sectors. These challenges include technological and financial constraints, regulatory fragmentation, and the need for effective knowledge transfer mechanisms.

To overcome these barriers, 2B-BLUE has established an integrated framework centered around Demonstration Sites (DS), Blue Biotechnology Hubs (BBHubs), and Transformation Labs (T-Labs). These mechanisms serve as testing grounds, collaboration platforms, and innovation accelerators, ensuring that BBt applications are refined, validated, and aligned with industry and policy needs. DSs allow for real-world testing of pilot actions, enabling the collection of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to assess the technical, economic, environmental, and social impact of each BBt innovation. Meanwhile, T-Labs bring together key stakeholders, including researchers, industry representatives, policymakers, and civil society actors, fostering an environment of continuous learning, adaptation, and co-creation.

A crucial outcome of the project has been the identification and deployment of pilot actions that target high-priority BBt applications. These include macroalgae-based bioremediation, Integrated Multi-Trophic Aquaculture (IMTA), carbon footprint tokenization, and biorefinery models. Each pilot is evaluated using a structured set of KPIs, ensuring that solutions are not only scientifically viable but also financially sustainable and environmentally beneficial. The alignment of BBt solutions with regional market needs and sustainability goals is a key priority, ensuring that pilot outcomes can be scaled and transferred across different blue economy sectors.

To support the long-term success and scaling of BBt solutions, 2B-BLUE emphasizes a set of strategic actions aimed at bridging the gap between policy frameworks, financial mechanisms, and industry adoption. These efforts include harmonizing regulations to facilitate market entry, fostering knowledge transfer through specialized training programs, expanding industry partnerships and creating circular business models that attract sustainable investment. Additionally, the project highlights the importance of dedicated financial instruments, such as EU-backed venture capital funds and risk-sharing programs, to help BBt enterprises move from pilot validation to large-scale deployment.

2. Establishing Joint Research Activities

The DS in the 2B-BLUE project are designated areas where BBt solutions, practices, and technologies are tested, validated, and showcased in real-world conditions. These sites serve as experimental platforms that allow for the controlled assessment of feasibility, efficiency, and impact; facilitating the transition from research to applied solutions. By integrating into the BBHubs network, the DS ensures cross-regional collaboration, stakeholder engagement, and knowledge transfer, supporting innovation and business development in the Mediterranean's blue economy.

Located in Albania, France, Greece, Italy, Slovenia, and Spain; the DS will focus on testing and validating the most promising BBt solutions, assessing their technological performance, economic viability, and environmental impact.

To foster effective industry collaboration, each BBHub will establish Joint Research Activities (JRA), engaging research institutions, businesses, policymakers, and civil society in structured partnerships. These JRA provide a framework for co-design, testing, and validation, aligning innovations with market needs and regulatory frameworks while ensuring their long-term sustainability.

A defining feature of JRAs is their capacity to support business model development, encouraging investment in sustainable BBt. By bridging research and industry, JRA facilitate the commercialization of research-driven innovations, reinforcing the Euro-Mediterranean leadership in BBt. Embedded within industrial processes and policy frameworks, they ensure that validated technologies can be scaled and sustained, contributing to a more resilient and innovative blue economy.

Each DS will implement pilot activities, following rigorous monitoring and evaluation plans to assess impact. The results will be documented, analyzed, and modelled, ensuring effective knowledge transfer and replication in other regions. These efforts will generate key outputs, including solutions to accelerate BBt transfer, pilot studies on sustainable aquaculture and algae-based products, strategic policy recommendations, and capacity-building initiatives.

PART II – PUBLIC NOTICE

Within the aforementioned context and by means of the present notice the National Institute of Biology begins the selection of partners with the appropriate technical and economic capacity requirements to form part of the JRA.

This notice is for exploratory purposes only and does not create any legal position or obligation with respect to the National Institute of Biology, which reserves the right to suspend, modify or cancel, in whole or in part and at its sole discretion, the procedure initiated, without the participants being entitled to any claim whatsoever.

It should also be noted that this procedure is not subject to the public procurement rules set out in Directive 2014/24/EU, as no consideration and/or other forms of compensation are envisaged in favor of the private partner, who will be identified at the end of the procedure and who will therefore be required to provide its collaboration entirely free of charge.

The National Institute of Biology will ensure that partners who will be selected for JRA implementation will be provided with all necessary consumables and small equipment. Necessary consumables and small equipment should be described by the partner in the application form.

1. OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this notice is to set up criteria for the selection of partners for JRA under the 2B-BLUE project.

The JRA will be led by the National Institute of Biology.

In particular, the JRA will establish an effective collaboration between parties carrying out the activities described below in the 3 thematic fields:

1. **Large-Scale Microalgae Production for Cosmetics.** The site will prioritize the upscaling of microalgae cultivation for the extraction of high-value bioactive compounds, particularly for cosmetic applications. This private sector company should possess advanced

biotechnological expertise to drive the efficient scaling of production, optimization of biomass yield, and deployment of large-scale bioreactors and extraction technologies. Detailed activities are:

- Establishment of pilot-scale microalgae production units, incorporating advanced bioreactors, photobioreactors, and possibly open-pond systems.
- Optimization of growth conditions through continuous monitoring of physico-chemical parameters (light intensity, CO_2 levels)

2. **Valorization of Fisheries and Aquaculture By-Products:** A core initiative involves transforming fisheries and aquaculture by-products and discards—currently underutilized resources—into high-added-value biopolymers for biomedical and cosmetic uses. This approach directly supports circular blue economy principles by reducing waste, maximizing resource efficiency, and creating new bio-based products for high-demand markets. The activities expected to be carried out by a private sector partner are:

    - Provide collection system for fishery and aquaculture by-products, including shellfish, fish skin, bones, jellyfish and exoskeletons of crustaceans.
    - Provide empirical data on aquaculture and fisheries by-product streams
    - Assist in site-specific environmental and operational studies.
    - Guarantee appropriate biomaterial storage system for further processing

3. **Development of Innovative Sea Sponge Aquaculture Systems:** Slovenia will pioneer sustainable aquaculture systems dedicated to cultivating sea sponges, capitalizing on their rich bioactive properties with potential applications in pharmaceuticals and cosmetics. Additionally, these systems contribute to ecosystem services such as water filtration and habitat enhancement, further supporting environmental sustainability. The expected activities of the partner are:

    - Conduct preliminary feasibility studies on the cultivation of marine sponges in controlled environments.
    - Adjustment of the sponge cultivation methodologies based on environmental and biological responses observed during trials.

2. DURATION.

The duration of JRA will be up to 2 years from the date of signature of the Memorandum of understanding.

3. NO CONSIDERATION.

The Applicant will receive no fee or other prices in consideration of the activities described in the section 1. OBJECTIVE. The partner of the JRA will be requested to participate in such activities mobilizing its own resources, while consumables and small equipment will be provided by the National Institute of Biology.

4. PROPOSALS BY THE APPLICANTS

The Applicant must submit a proposal to participate in the JRA providing the following details:

- Possession of the requirements as provided by section 5. REQUIREMENTS FOR PARTICIPATION hereinafter.

- Description of experience in the fields covered by the JRA.

- List of key staff.

- Material and immaterial resources which may be mobilized for the benefit of the JRA.
- Consumables and small equipment, which will be needed to perform the activities within JRA. Table to be filled in can be downloaded **here**.
- Any other relevant information.

5. REQUIREMENTS FOR PARTICIPATION.

The Applicant has to comply with the following requirements for admission to the procedure.

A. MORAL REQUIREMENTS

Absence of one or more of the situations as follows:

(a) The Applicant is undergoing bankruptcy procedure or is the subject of insolvency or winding-up proceedings, where its assets are being administered by a liquidator or by the court, where it is in an arrangement with creditors, where its business activities are suspended or it is in any analogous situation arising from a similar procedure under national laws and regulations.

(b) The Applicant has been found guilty of grave professional misconduct, which renders its integrity questionable

(c) The Applicant has shown significant or persistent deficiencies in the performance of a substantive requirement under a prior contract with the National Institute of Biology or other Beneficiaries of the 2B-BLUE Project, which led to early termination of that prior contract, damages or other comparable sanctions.

B. TECHNICAL SUITABILITY REQUIREMENTS:

1. **Large-Scale Microalgae Production for Cosmetics.**
   - Own and operate regularly cultivation systems, such as bioreactors, close ponds, or open ponds.
   - Ability to scale up from lab-scale to larger scale production, with infrastructure that can accommodate increases in volume and adapt to new strains or product specifications
   - Demonstrable expertise in the field of microalgal cultivation and commercialization.
   - Technical capabilities to perform monitoring control for physico-chemical parameters
   - Contribute workforce and expertise in processing and product development.
   - Support market validation and integration into existing commercial channels.

2. **Valorization of Fisheries and Aquaculture By-Products.**
   - To manage large scale aquaculture operation in the Adriatic Sea.
   - To provide storage for fishery and aquaculture by-products
   - Contribute workforce and expertise in processing and product development.

3. **Development of Innovative Sea Sponge Aquaculture Systems.**

- To demonstrate experience in the cultivation of sponges.
- Owning a fully operational experimental fish farm.
- Operating/having access to a facility with an operating open sea sponge culture.

C. ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL CAPACITY REQUIREMENTS

Applicants are required to fill in self-declaration related to economic and financial capacity.

6. APPLICATIONS

The applicant must submit the application for participation in Slovenian or English languages, using the following online application form – **link**.

Applications should be submitted no later than 31.5.2025, 23.59 CEST.

Applications received after this date and/or submitted by other means shall not be accepted.

The application is sent at the sender's own risk. The National Institute of Biology shall not be held responsible in the event of non-delivery due to causes, including those of an electronic nature, not attributable to the National Institute of Biology or its digital equipment.

7. EVALUATION

Applications are evaluated by the internal 2B-BLUE team of the National Institute of Biology. The evaluation committee is composed of 4 members of the project team. The evaluation results will be submitted within 10 working days after the closure of this call for expression of interest. Each applicant will be notified of the evaluation results individually by email to the email address provided in the application form.

Each committee member will evaluate each application individually. All individual scores will be summarised at the end and the applicants with the highest scores will be invited to sign a memorandum of understanding. It is expected that at least one applicant with the highest score from each area of interest will be invited to sign Memorandum of Understanding.

The evaluation criteria are listed in the table below.

	Criterion	Maximum score
1	Technical capacity	5
2	Experience in the fields covered by the JRA.	5
3	Expertise and qualification of key staff members	5
4	Partners material and immaterial resources for the implementation of Reactivities	5

5	Appropriateness of consumables and small equipment planning	5
Total maximum score		25

Scores explanation:

Score	Description
5	Excellent - requirements are fully met or exceeded
4	Good – requirements are met well.
3	Satisfactory – requirements are adequately met.
2	Poor – requirements are partially met.
1	Very poor – does not meet the requirements.

Applications that fail to comply with moral and economical and financial capacity requirements as stated in section 5. REQUIREMENTS FOR PARTICIPATION, will not be evaluated in details.

8. PROTECTION OF PERSONAL DATA

The Applicant shall give consent to the National Institute of Biology to process any personal data (i.e., name, family name, contact details, data contained in the CV and the related documentation).

The National Institute of Biology acting as controller, shall process such personal data exclusively for the purpose to carry out the activities concerning the present selection procedure and to manage the contract with the successful Applicant.

Personal data shall be considered confidential. Nevertheless, such data may be shared with the evaluators involved in the selection process (to be identified within the members of the consortium), as well as with any competent authority as provided by the law.

The data owner shall have the rights set out by the European Union Law, and in particular by Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data. Specifically, the data owner shall be entitled to obtain from the National Institute of Biology the rectification, erasure or blocking of data the processing of which does not comply with the provisions of the Regulation (EU) 2016/679, in particular because of the incomplete or inaccurate nature of the data.

9. OTHER PROVISIONS

The selection shall be carried out in a discretionary manner by the National Institute of Biology, that will organize an adequate selection panel. The panel will be composed of experts on the topics concerning the selection procedure.

If considered necessary, the Applicant may be convened for an on-line interview. The lack of response of the Applicant may be considered a refusal to be involved in the procedure of establishing the JRA.

This procedure may be revoked at any time, and it cannot generate any legitimate expectations for Applicants that their proposal will be accepted.

No reimbursement of costs or payment of fees is foreseen for the Applicants for the sole reason of the participation in the selection procedure.

The present procedure is subject to the Slovenian Law and any controversy which may arise shall be subject to the exclusive competence of the competent Slovenian courts.

10. FURTHER INFORMATION

This notice will be published on the National Institute of Biology website and 2B-Blue project website. The notice will be valid for 15 days from the date of publication

For further information, please contact MarBio@nib.si .