JPI Oceans Joint Action – Offshore Freshened Groundwater

Joint Transnational Call 2025

National Rules for Participation – State Aid

These Rules for Participation are applicable to undertakings that carry out an economic activity within the meaning of Article 107 TFEU.

Version: 1

Issue Date: 04/12/2025

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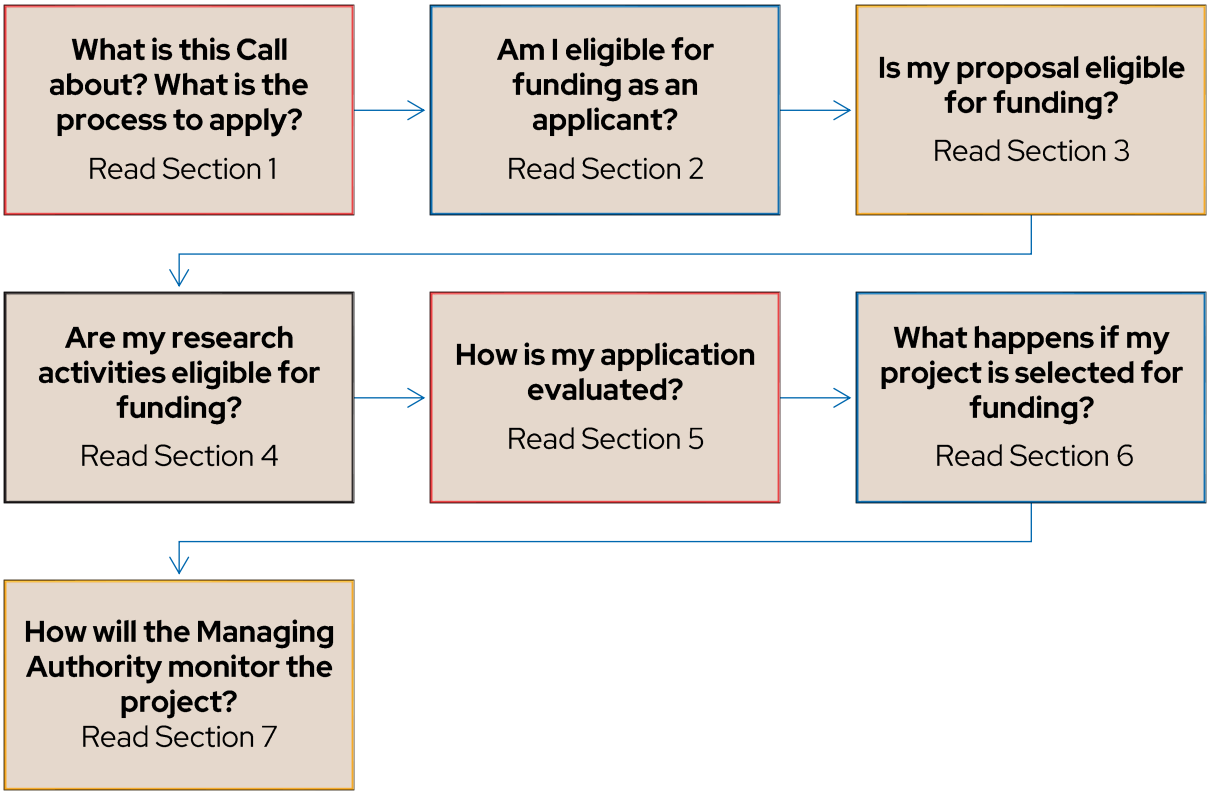
Guide to this document

Figure 1: Guide to the document flow chart



1. Introduction

Xjenza Malta (referred to as the 'Managing Authority' hereafter) is administering the **2025 Joint Transnational Call of the JPI Oceans Offshore Freshened Groundwater Joint Action** and is located at Villa Bighi, Kalkara, KKR 1320, Malta.

The **JPI Oceans Joint Call on Offshore Freshened Groundwater (OFG)** aims to address key knowledge gaps related to offshore freshened groundwater resources and to ensure that research efforts help in advancing both scientific understanding and practical approaches, to ultimately inform national and international governance frameworks.

The primary objective of this Joint Call is to act as a "proof of concept" through the launch of a pioneering scientific drilling campaign that integrates hydrogeological and geochemical characterisation, with pumping tests, to validate OFG systems and generate critical data on their distribution, properties, recharge mechanisms, and long-term viability as a resource.

This initiative aims to lay the groundwork for the potential future strategic use and sustainable management of OFG resources. The campaign will target knowledge gaps, including:

- Data scarcity and inconsistency: generating systematic and comprehensive data on OFG properties and dynamics.
- Environmental, technological, and economic feasibility: assessing the environmental impacts and evaluating the technological and economic viability of potential OFG utilisation, while generating evidence-based input to inform resource governance frameworks/to guide policy and governance development.
- Legal and governance frameworks: informing and potentially contributing to the development of guidelines and regulatory frameworks for the integration of OFG exploration and exploitation into existing regimes.

For further details on eligible topics for funding and list of funding organisations, please visit the Call website.

1.1 Definitions

Agreement Date	The term refers to the date on which the Grant Agreement is signed by the legal representative of Xjenza Malta.
Applicant	The term refers to any representative of a local entity that is eligible for participation in a Project in terms of these National Rules for Participation and who applies for funding under this joint initiative.
Arm's length	The term means that the conditions of the transaction between the contracting parties do not differ from those which would be stipulated between independent undertakings and contain no element of collusion. Any transaction that results from an open, transparent and non-discriminatory procedure is considered as meeting the arm's length principle.
Beneficiary	The term Beneficiary refers to the entity that having submitted an application form for funding under this Programme in accordance with these National Rules for Participation, is selected for funding.
Due Diligence	An investigation of an entity or person prior to the signing of the Grant Agreement conducted in order to establish the suitability of the applicant to receive funding under this Programme.
Effective Collaboration	The term means collaboration between at least two independent parties to exchange knowledge or technology, or to achieve a common objective based on the division of labour where the parties jointly define the scope of the collaborative project, contribute to its implementation, and share its risks, as well as its results. One or several parties may bear the full costs of the project and thus relieve other parties of its financial risks. Contract research and provision of research services are not considered forms of collaboration.
Eligible Direct Costs	The term refers to those costs incurred directly by the national beneficiaries during the duration of the project and used primarily for the purpose of achieving the objectives of the project. All eligible expenses must be incurred between the Start Date and the End Date of the Project and capped at the approved requested funding value.
Eligible Undertakings	The term refers to undertakings planning to carry out Fundamental Research, Industrial Research and/or Experimental Development projects and must either be: i. a partnership constituted under the Companies Act, being a partnership *en nom collectif, en commandite* or a limited liability company; or ii. be duly registered as a co-operative society under the Co-Operative Societies Act; or

	iii. Professional body; or iv. NGOs; or v. Non-profit making entities (including Foundations). 'Professional Body' may be an organisation, an association, a chamber, society, institute, or a group of professional persons not being enrolled or registered in terms of The Voluntary Organisations Act (CAP 492 of the Laws of Malta) or not being otherwise recognised in terms of Law, and which is generally recognised and acknowledged by the professional persons it seeks to represent as their representative body. For the purposes of this Definition, a professional person is one who has undergone a period of study at a university or a recognised institution of higher learning and has obtained the formal qualification entitling the person to practise the respective profession; and who provides a specialised service to the public, based primarily on a fiduciary relationship between herself/himself and the party to whom s/he provides such service on his own personal credibility and responsibility. 'NGO' means any Voluntary or Non-Governmental Organisation set up in accordance with The Voluntary Organisations Act (CAP 492 of the Laws of Malta). Provided that a duly registered NGO, or a duly registered Professional Body shall also be considered to be NGOs for the purposes of these Rules of Participation 'Non-profit making' is an entity where: i. The statute of which includes an express exclusion making profits as a purpose; and ii. An entity the statute of which expressly excludes in its purposes the promotion of private interests, other than a private interest which has a social purpose; and iii. An entity that makes no part of its income, capital or property available directly or indirectly to any promoter, founder, member, administrator, donor or any other private interest. Provided that if a promoter, founder, member, administrator or donor is another enrolled non-profit making organisation, the limitation in this paragraph (iii) shall not apply where the availability of such income, capital or property is subject to conditions which are consistent with the general purposes of the grantor entity:

	Provided further that an organisation shall continue to be deemed as non-profit making notwithstanding that: i. It obtains a pecuniary gain from its activities when such gain is not received or credited to its members but is exclusively utilised for its established purposes; ii. It buys or sells or otherwise deals in goods or services where such activities are exclusively related to its principal purposes; iii. It is established for the general entertainment, pastime, education or other similar benefit only of its members; or iv. It is established for the promotion of the social role, ethics, education and values of a trade or profession provided it does not promote the private interests of its members.
End Date	This term refers to the date when the Project Period, having commenced on the Start Date, expires.
Grant Agreement	The Grant Agreement (GA) is the funding agreement concluded between the Managing Authority and the Beneficiary/ies and specifies the rights and obligations of the contracting parties.
In-kind	The term refers to any non-monetary contribution, such as a service or a good.
Innovation	The term is defined as the internationally novel scientific/technological development of a technological process, product, or service. Also, the definition of Innovation within the same context can also be applied to developments which though not novel represent a step-changing or ground-breaking enhancement of existing technological processes, products, or services, or even the application of existing knowledge to new novel applications of these solutions to deliver step-change competitiveness through such an application.
Intellectual Property (IP)	IP means statutory and other proprietary rights and includes patents, trademarks, designs, and confidential information/trade secrets, copyright.
Large Undertaking	The term is defined as an undertaking not fulfilling the criteria laid down in Annex I of Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Article 107 and 108 of the Treaty, as amended.
Legal Entity	The term refers to any entity created within the European Union, having an operating base in Malta and which has legal personality, which may, acting under its own name, exercise rights and be subject to obligations.
Managing Authority	The term refers to Xjenza Malta, a Managing Authority established as per Subsidiary Legislation 595.49.

Operating base in Malta	Having an Operating base in Malta refers to a Legal Entity that: i. Owns, leases, or has been given the right of use by a third party, an adequate premise from where to conduct an eligible economic activity in the region of Malta; and ii. Employs at least one person that is based in Malta and is liable to pay income tax in Malta.
Partner	The term is defined as an entity within a consortium of a funded transnational project.
Person months / Person hours	The term refers to a calculation of 'human effort' to evaluate the relationship between the estimated work to be performed and the activities and deliverables to be achieved during the implementation period in months or hours. This is calculated as follows: if 1720 hours are worked in 1 year, equivalent to 215 days of 8 hours each, then 1 person month is equivalent to 143.3... person hours, and to circa 17.91 days.
Personnel Costs	The term means the costs of researchers, technicians and other supporting staff to the extent employed on the relevant project or activity.
Principal Investigator	The term refers to the lead researcher on behalf of the local Applicant/Beneficiary of a transnational project consortium. May be the same as the Project Coordinator and/or the Project Contact Point.
Programme	Programme refers to the Joint Programming Initiative Healthy and Productive Seas and Oceans (JPI Oceans) 'Offshore Freshened Groundwater' Joint Action.
Project Contact Point	The term refers to the individual, appointed to act on behalf of the Beneficiary and who is responsible for communicating with the Managing Authority about the Project. The Project Contact Point(s) shall have the following responsibilities: i. To ensure compliance with the obligations in terms of the Grant Agreement. ii. To compile Periodic Reports and Final Reports including their timely submissions and effective execution of the project. iii. To ensure the submission of all required financial reporting as per the contractual obligations for the partner. iv. To execute the project activities according to set timeframes and deliverables.
Project Coordinator	The term refers to one of the beneficiaries of a transnational project consortium that is appointed as the single point of contact between the JPI Oceans 'Offshore Freshened Groundwater' Joint Call Secretariat

	and/or the funding bodies and the consortium partners from proposal submission to project end. The Project Coordinator will have the responsibility of ensuring that all the transnational partners involved in the consortium are eligible and supervises the project workflow with the help of WP leaders. Additionally, the Project Coordinator will be required to submit the project application on behalf of the consortium and must also compile and submit reports/deliverables to the JPI Oceans 'Offshore Freshened Groundwater' Joint Call Secretariat.
Project Grant	The term is defined as the funding provided to the Beneficiary under the Programme.
Project Period	The term refers to the time required to execute the Project as indicated in the Grant Agreement and runs from the Start Date to the End Date.
Project Value	The term refers to the project budget needed by the Applicant to carry out the project, including any co-financing.
Research and Development	This term is defined as the systematic investigation, work or research carried out in any field of science or technology through experiment, theoretical work or analysis undertaken to acquire new knowledge, primarily directed towards a specific practical aim or objective, and includes: i. **Fundamental Research** means experimental or theoretical work undertaken primarily to acquire new knowledge of the underlying foundations of phenomena and observable facts, without any direct commercial application or use in view. ii. **Industrial Research** means the planned research or critical investigation aimed at the acquisition of new knowledge and skills for developing new products, processes, or services or aimed at bringing about a significant improvement in existing products, processes or services including digital products, processes or services, in any area, technology, industry or sector (including, but not limited to, digital industries and technologies, such as super-computing, quantum technologies, block chain technologies, artificial intelligence, cyber security, big data and cloud technologies). It comprises the creation of components parts of complex systems and may include the construction of prototypes in a laboratory environment or in an environment with simulated interfaces to existing systems as well as of pilot lines, when necessary for the industrial research and notably for generic technology validation. iii. **Experimental Development** means acquiring, combining, shaping and using existing scientific, technological, business and other

	relevant knowledge and skills with the aim of developing new or improved products, processes or services in any area, technology, industry or sector (including, but not limited to, digital industries and technologies, such as for example super-computing, quantum technologies, block chain technologies, artificial intelligence, cyber security, big data and cloud or edge technologies). This may also include, for example, activities aiming at the conceptual definition, planning and documentation of new products, processes or services. Experimental development may comprise prototyping, demonstrating, piloting, testing and validation of new or improved products, processes or services in environments representative of real-life operating conditions where the primary objective is to make further technical improvements on products, processes or services that are not substantially set. This may include the development of a commercially usable prototype or pilot which is necessarily the final commercial product, and which is too expensive to produce for it to be used only for demonstration and validation purposes. Experimental development does not include routine or periodic changes made to existing products, production lines, manufacturing processes, services, and other operations in progress, even if those changes may represent improvements.
Research and Knowledge-Dissemination Organisation (RKDO)	The term refers to an entity (such as universities or research institutes, technology transfer agencies, Innovation intermediaries, research-oriented physical or virtual collaborative entities), irrespective of its legal status (organised under public or private law) or way of financing, whose primary goal is to independently conduct fundamental research, industrial research or experimental development or to widely disseminate the results of such activities by way of teaching, publication or knowledge transfer. Where such entity also pursues economic activities the financing, the costs and the revenues of those economic activities must be accounted for separately. Undertakings that can exert a decisive influence upon such an entity, in the quality of, for example, shareholders or members, may not enjoy preferential access to the results generated by it.
Small and Medium-sized Enterprise (SME)	The term refers to an undertaking which fulfils the criteria laid down in Annex I of Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty, as amended.

Single Undertaking	The term means all enterprises having at least one of the following relationships with each other: i. One enterprise has a majority of the shareholders' or members' voting rights in another enterprise. ii. One enterprise has the right to appoint or remove a majority of the members of the administrative, management or supervisory body of another enterprise. iii. One enterprise has the right to exercise a dominant influence on another enterprise pursuant to a contract entered into with that enterprise or pursuant to a provision in its Memorandum and Articles of association. iv. One enterprise, which is a shareholder in or member of another enterprise, controls alone, pursuant to an agreement with other shareholders in or members of that enterprise, a majority of shareholders' or members' voting rights in that enterprise. Enterprises having any of the relationships referred to in points (i) to (iv) above through one or more other enterprises shall be considered to be a Single Undertaking.
Start Date	The term refers to date established for the official start of the project in the Grant Agreement.
Start of Works	This term refers to the earlier of either the Start of Works relating to the investment, or the first legally binding commitment to order equipment or any other commitment that makes the investment irreversible. Buying land and preparatory works such as obtaining permits and conducting feasibility studies are not considered 'Start of Works'. For take-overs, 'Start of Works' means the moment of acquiring the assets directly linked to the acquired establishment.
Start-up	The term shall be defined as an undertaking that has been established for less than five (5) years following its registration. For Eligible Undertakings that are not subject to registration, the five-year eligibility period shall start from either the moment when the undertaking starts its economic activity or the moment it becomes liable to tax with regard to its economic activity, whichever is earlier.
Subcontracted Activity	The term refers to any activity related to the project, (including but not limited to consultancy), which is not carried out directly by a Beneficiary or its employees but is carried out under any terms by any third party (local or foreign) individual, company, partnership, or entity.
Undertaking in Difficulty	The term refers to an undertaking in respect of which at least one of the following circumstances occurs:

	i. In the case of a limited liability company (other than an SME that has been in existence for less than three years), where more than half of its subscribed share capital has disappeared as a result of accumulated losses. This is the case when deduction of accumulated losses from reserves (and all other elements generally considered as part of the own funds of the company) leads to a negative cumulative amount that exceeds half of the subscribed share capital. For the purposes of this provision, 'limited liability company' refers in particular to the types of company mentioned in Annex I of Directive 2013/34/EU and 'share capital' includes, where relevant, any share premium. ii. In the case of a company where at least some of its members have unlimited liability for the debt of the company (other than an SME that has been in existence for less than three years), where more than half of its capital as shown in the company accounts has disappeared as a result of accumulated losses. For the purposes of this provision, 'a company where at least some of its members have unlimited liability for the debt of the company' refers in particular to the types of company mentioned in Annex II of Directive 2013/34/EU. iii. Where the undertaking is subject to collective insolvency proceedings or fulfils the criteria under its domestic law for being placed in collective insolvency proceedings at the request of its creditors. iv. Where the undertaking has received rescue aid and has not yet reimbursed the loan or terminated the guarantee or has received restructuring aid and is still subject to a restructuring plan. v. In the case of an undertaking that is not an SME, where for the past two years: a. The undertaking's book debt to equity ratio has been greater than 7.5 and b. The undertaking's EBITDA interest coverage ratio has been below 1.0.
Wide Dissemination	The term refers to the criterion stipulated by Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/ 2014, as amended. For the purposes of this scheme, the results of the project are deemed to be widely disseminated if this is done in at least three Member States or contracting parties to the EEA

	Agreement through conferences, publication, open access repositories, or free or open-source software.

1.2 Call Process and Snapshot

Timeline

The Call process consists of one (1) stage as per flow chart below:

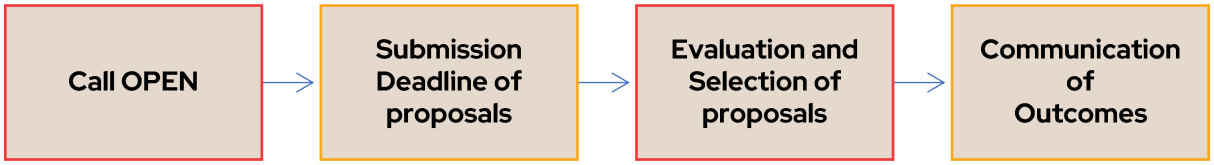


Figure 2: step-by-step process

Proposal

The Project Coordinator must submit the proposal on behalf of the consortium to the JPI Oceans 'Offshore Freshened Groundwater' Joint Call Secretariat as per Call Text.

Malta-based applicants are required to follow the latest version of the National Rules for Participation and check their eligibility as applicants (Section 2), check the eligibility of their project proposal (Section 3) and costings of the project (Section 4) and to submit a National Application Form accompanied by the relevant documentation (Section 1.3).

N.B: Applications must be submitted before the Start of Works *[see definition in Section 1.1].*

Proposals will be evaluated, and applicants will be duly informed whether their proposal was successful or not.

Call Snapshot

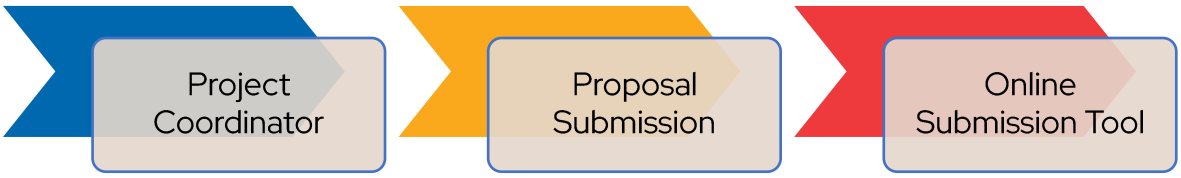
Call Website	https://www.jpi-oceans.eu/en/joint-call-offshore-freshened-groundwater
Xjenza Malta reference documents	Open Funding Schemes – Xjenza Malta
TRL levels supported	TRL 1 - 7
Project Duration	36 months
Max. funds that can jointly be requested by Malta-based eligible partner/s per project (EUR)	€300,000
Submission Deadline of the Proposal	**6 March 2026, 17:00 CET**
Submission Platform	https://jpi-oceans.eu/en/form/ofg-call-application-form

Submission deadline of National Application Form and Relevant Documentation	6 March 2026, 23:59 CET
Xjenza Malta Submission Email	eusubmissions.xjenzamalta@gov.mt

1.3 Application Submission Details

The applicant should ensure complete compliance with these National Rules for Participation prior to applying for this Call. No additions, amendments or negotiations are allowed after submission, unless requested by the Managing Authority. Any unapproved deviations from these National Rules for Participation will result in the application being declared inadmissible during the administrative check.

The technical proposals need to be submitted electronically by the Project Coordinator via the Joint Call Secretariat Platform on behalf of the transnational consortium, by the submission deadline indicated below:



Deadline for proposal submission:
06/03/2026, 17:00 CET

Additionally, a **National Application Form needs to be submitted electronically by each Malta-based Applicant** to eusubmissions.xjenzamalta@gov.mt, by the submission deadline indicated below.

Deadline for submission of National Application Form:
06/03/2026, 23:59 CET

Submission Documents

- Only **complete** National Application Forms submitted by the deadline shall be considered.
- All documentation submitted must be in English.

- Each proposal will be checked for administrative eligibility before it is considered for scientific evaluation. This means that failure of one of the consortium partners to meet the eligibility criteria may cause the entire project to be rejected.
- In case of multiple submissions of the same application in the same selection round the last version submitted before the deadline will be that considered for evaluation.
- It should be noted that emails larger than 20MB will be automatically rejected by the system. The applicant may make use of cloud storage. **It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that application documents are sent out successfully and properly received by Xjenza Malta.**
- Physical submissions of applications or supporting documents will not be accepted under any circumstances. Applicants are strongly encouraged to double-check their submissions to ensure completeness and correct format.

Documents

Applicants need to submit a **National Application Form** accompanied by **declarations** in the form of annexes to the National Application Form. These documents will be reviewed during the eligibility check, and consist of the following:

- National Application Form in MS Word (.docx) and a signed scanned copy in PDF format.
- Declarations applicable to Indirect State Aid, when an eligible undertaking is a partner in the same project consortium as a public entity and/or public research and knowledge-dissemination organisation that does not carry out an economic activity within the meaning of Article 107 TFEU.
- *Curricula Vitae* of Principal Investigator and other key researchers highlighting R&I related experience. These should clearly establish that the Consortium has the potential to carry out the assigned project tasks/activities.
- Budget Breakdown Form in MS Excel (.xlsx) and in PDF format.
- *De minimis* (Regulation A):
    - *De minimis* Declaration form
- General Block Exemption Regulation (Regulation B):
    - Undertaking In Difficulty form & Enterprise Size Declaration form
    - Declarations for Augmented Aid Intensity

In addition, Eligible Undertakings are required to provide the **Memorandum & Articles of Association *[or other constitutive document/s]*** in addition to the National Application Form.

Other forms of documentation can be requested depending on the nature of the Eligible Undertaking.

Eligible Undertakings that are Professional Bodies or NGOs are still required to provide constitutive documents, and may be requested to provide other documents, including but not limited to, a Statute/Deed (Authenticated) and Voluntary Organisation (VO)

Eligible Undertakings, **including professional Bodies or NGOs**, are also required to provide **audited financial statements** for the last three (3) fiscal years. Where unavailable, applicants are to provide **management accounts** including:

i. A detailed profit and loss, and
ii. A balance sheet for the current year.

Start-ups, who may not have the above-mentioned financial documents, are required to provide **financial projections** for three (3) years signed by an independent certified public accountant, including:

i. An income statement,
ii. A cash flow statement, and
iii. A statement of financial position.

Other forms of documentation can be requested during the Call Process or during the Grant Agreement Preparation phase.

Undertakings will be subjected to a Due Diligence evaluation which will make use of the documents submitted as well as documents within public record. Additional documentation may be requested by the Managing Authority, based on the outcomes of the Due Diligence evaluation.

Changes to the submitted proposal are not allowed, unless requested and/or approved by the Managing Authority.

National Contact Point(s)

Oksana Pachomcik
Programme Officer

Email: oksana.pachomcik@gov.mt

Further correspondence should be directed to:

Xjenza Malta,
Villa Bighi, Kalkara, KKR 1320, Malta

Email: eusubmissions.xjenzamalta@gov.mt

For escalated matters kindly contact Dr. Maria Azzopardi, Internationalisation Unit Director, on maria.azzopardi.2@gov.mt.

Respecting Lead Times

All organisations, including Xjenza Malta, have their internal procedures for processing, approving and signing off on legally binding documents. Beneficiaries are to ensure that they are aware of these lead times in their organisation as well as in the other organisations which may be involved. It is the applicant's responsibility to ask for information on lead times pertaining to Xjenza Malta. Applicants should also consider personal commitments, vacation leave etc, when planning to apply.

Assistance with Applications

Prospective applicants are encouraged to seek the guidance of the Managing Authority in the preparation of the project application. This should help identify any areas of concern prior to the submission of the application and lead to a better quality of submission. Advice shall only be given in respect of these National Rules for Participation, and no guidance will be provided on the technical aspects of the application. Applicants are particularly encouraged to seek Xjenza Malta's guidance through proposal-specific one-to-one sessions to ensure that the application documentation is complete and effective, as once submitted, it cannot be edited.

2. Applicant Eligibility

2.1 Eligibility of Entity

These Rules for Participation are applicable to undertakings that carry out an economic activity within the meaning of Article 107 TFEU.

This section lists the criteria which must be satisfied to establish the Applicant's eligibility and the suitability of the application.

Any Eligible Undertakings, with an Operating base in Malta, as defined in Section 1.1, may apply and will be eligible for funding, subject to the terms and conditions laid out in the latest version of the National Rules for Participation.

Any Applicant which at the time of proposal submission is deemed to be non-compliant with respect to Grant Agreement obligations on any other active project funded by Xjenza Malta, may be deemed ineligible at application stage or may be refused funding under this Programme. For the purposes of this paragraph non-compliance with respect to Grant Agreement obligations shall also be deemed to include failure to respect approved project timelines on other projects funded by the Managing Authority and circumstances where the Applicant is in recognised default of Grant Agreement obligations on any other active project funded by the Managing Authority. Similarly, should applicants become non-compliant during the call process, they will not be awarded funding under this Programme.

Any Application may be deemed as ineligible in terms of these National Rules for Participation, if it is submitted by or includes the participation of any person or entity having, in totality or in majority ownership, the same shareholders, Partners or persons holding and/ or exercising a controlling power in any other Legal Entity which was at any time declared as non-compliant or defaulting on any other contract or agreement entered into with the Managing Authority.

Applicant/s and/or Beneficiary/ies shall take all measures to prevent any situation where the impartial and objective processing of their Application for funding, the awarding of the Grant or the supervision or the implementation of the Grant agreement could be compromised for reasons involving family, emotional life, political or national affinity, economic interest or any other direct or indirect or perceived interest (conflict of interests).

Applicant/s and/or Beneficiary/ies shall formally notify the Managing Authority without delay of any situation constituting or likely to lead to an actual or perceived conflict of interest and immediately take all the necessary steps to rectify this situation.

The Managing Authority may verify that the measures taken are appropriate and may require additional measures to be taken by a specified deadline.

Where a beneficiary wilfully breaches any of its obligations under this Rule, this shall be deemed to constitute an Event of Default, and the Application may be deemed ineligible or the Grant awarded may be reduced and/or terminated.

2.2 Funding Consideration

Applicants may opt to be funded under one (1) of the following two regulations.

Regulation A ***de minimis*** (Annex 1)	**Regulation B** **GBER** (Annex 2)

Applicants are required to **select their preference** within the National Application Form.

Malta-based applicants must **ensure that they are eligible** to be funded under the selected Regulation before applying. Applicants should read through and understand the regulations governing the State Aid regimes before applying (Refer to Annexes 1 and 2).

All applications should be accompanied by the relevant State Aid declaration forms. Applicants should quantify **any possible indirect State aid** that may result from collaboration with partners applying under the non-state aid route, i.e., Public Entities and Public Research and Knowledge-Dissemination Organisations that do not carry out an economic activity within the meaning of Article 107 TFEU in the relevant Annex.

Successful applicants will be requested to update their declaration forms at the time of the signing of the Grant Agreement, to ensure that the applicant remains eligible for funding under the applicable State Aid regime.

3. Proposal Eligibility

The following criteria are mandatory and must be fulfilled when applying for this Call, in addition to eligibility conditions described in the JPI Oceans 'Offshore Freshened Groundwater' Joint Action Call Text.

3.1 Types of Projects

The research type(s) of projects eligible within this Call encompass Fundamental Research, Industrial Research and Experimental Development, as defined in Section 1.1.

Malta-based applicants can propose projects of Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs) between TRL 1 and 7. Nevertheless, applicants should ensure that they are addressing any specific TRL levels as outlined in the Call Text.

3.2 Alignment to Scope

The proposal should be consistent with the scope and objectives of this Call *[Refer to Section 1]*.

Malta-based applicants can propose projects addressing at least one or all the themes defined in the Call Text and outlined below:

1. Characterisation, validation, and assessment of offshore freshened groundwater bodies, through a drilling campaign. Scientific questions originated from knowledge gaps:
   - Functioning of OFG systems and onshore-offshore connectivity
   - Age of emplacement of the OFG
   - Hydraulic and hydrogeologic properties
   - Potential environmental impacts emerging from use of OFG
2. Environmental assessment of offshore freshened groundwater seeps (developing environmental baselines)
   - Seep characterisation (functioning of seepage)
   - Seep-related ecosystems characterisation (bio-geochemical aspects)
   - Monitoring

3.3 Eligibility of Consortium Composition

Proposal must involve eligible research partners from at least three participating countries in this Call. Self-funded partners including partners from countries (and/or regions) not participating in this call are allowed. No maximum number of partners is specified.

Although proposals will be submitted jointly by teams from several regions/countries, teams will be funded by the respective funding organisation of the region/country from which they have applied. Applicants are therefore subject to the eligibility criteria of the respective funding organisations. The eligibility of each Partner in the consortium must be checked

according to the eligibility criteria published in the Call Text before submission of the proposal. Please note that if a proposal includes an ineligible partner, the whole proposal may be rejected, without further review.

Every Partner in the consortium, including collaborators, need to have a Participant Identification Code (PIC) from the EC to be included in the submission.

Malta-based applicants should check their national application submission requirements in Section 1.3 and their eligibility in Section 2.

3.4 Budget and Grant Value

The maximum amount that national partner/s can jointly request per project is **€300,000**.

Successful project submissions will receive periodic financing that will be regulated through a Grant Agreement establishing the terms and conditions governing the financing of the project. Refer to Section 6.

3.5 Project Duration

The maximum project duration is 36 months.

3.6 Project Contact Point(s)

Each Applicant shall appoint at least one Project Contact Point. The Project Contact Point(s)'s responsibilities are defined in Section 1.1.

3.7 Deliverables

Deliverables are tangible outcomes of the project and must be submissible. They must be proposed between the Start and End Date of the project. Deliverables not submitted within the stipulated deadlines will not be considered. If the project is awarded, evidence should be submitted for each deliverable mentioned in the application form to ensure that it has been attained successfully. A milestone refers to a key deliverable or achievement within the project.

It is recommended that file storing and synchronization service e.g., Google Drive or Dropbox, is set up and shared with the Managing Authority to support the project monitoring process. The shared folder should reflect the structure of deliverables provided in the Full proposal i.e., every deliverable should have its own sub-folder with evidence saved within.

The project's tasks for the Malta-based Partner must include the mandatory deliverables listed below. The sub-sections below list the Mandatory deliverables that are required by the Managing Authority and a non-exhaustive list of Recommended deliverables that may be considered. The project work plan should provide sufficient details of planned activities and incorporate these deliverables into the project proposal.

The Beneficiaries shall always cooperate with the Managing Authority in promoting the Programme by presenting the Awarded Project or through other reasonable means, as requested by the Managing Authority.

Mandatory Deliverables

i. Publish at least two (2) articles per year in local newspapers, online platforms, or magazines including an acknowledgement to the Managing Authority and any other acknowledgements as stipulated in Section 7.2. These should not contain Intellectual Property but should raise awareness about the project and its benefits. A copy of this/these should be presented to the Managing Authority within two weeks of publication. Other forms of publications may be considered.

ii. Report on project progress through reports and meetings as per Section 7.3 and in line with the templates provided by the Managing Authority.

Recommended Deliverables

i. During the duration of the project, publish at least one (1) peer-reviewed research paper based on the work carried out throughout the Project in an open-access journal. The paper is to include an acknowledgement to the Managing Authority and any other acknowledgements as stipulated in Section 7.2. In addition, or alternatively, during the duration of the project beneficiaries should also consider applying to the Xjenza Malta Schemes for Open Access Journal Support, which are specifically designed for Managing Authority beneficiaries. These schemes can be used to publish open access research linked to the awarded project under this Programme. Additionally, Xjenza Malta Schemes for Open Access Journal Support will be subject to the timelines governed by a separate agreement. Therefore, applying to these schemes with the intent to publish open access peer-reviewed research papers may be sufficient as a deliverable.

ii. Oral presentation/s at international conference/s on the work carried out through the Project.

iii. The attainment of undergraduate degrees and/or postgraduate degrees and/or post-doctoral research. (In cases where the Project duration is insufficient for the purpose of submitting a degree, there must be a commitment to complete the degree outside the duration of the project utilising other sources of funding).

iv. Additional project dissemination activities including but not limited to project exhibitions, workshops, and events (preferably open access). Examples include Science in the City, R&I cafes, Enterprise European Network events, project exhibitions etc.

v. Registration of patents or other Intellectual Property Rights stemming from the Project, in Malta as well as in any other country, on the work carried out throughout the project (or any tangible outcomes during the patenting process).

vi. The formation of any spin-off entities that are envisioned. Kindly highlight if these spin-offs will also be licencing any IP generated.

vii. Commercial commitments such as technology innovations to be included in a partner's existing product or service.

viii. Commercial commitments such as technology transfer licences.

Activities related to project set-up, such as personnel recruitment, procurement of equipment, internal meetings, etc, should not be considered as deliverables. This list of activities and the above recommended deliverables are indicative and not exhaustive. Where deliverables require periodic submissions (e.g. monthly reports on progress, reports on IP status etc.), it is only the final submission that will be considered as the deliverable.

The format of deliverables to be submitted must be specified at Grant Agreement Preparation stage. Deliverables may take the form of presentations, reports, correspondence, legal agreements, images, event agendas, audio recordings, videos, databases, certificate, manuscripts etc.

In the case of publications, these should take place during the duration of the project, and where available and possible, deposited in the entity's repository, including an acknowledgement to the Managing Authority. In cases were open access-fees were budgeted for, it is the responsibility of the Beneficiary to account for the time it would take for the invoicing and payment of that fee.

Provided further that if the Beneficiary claims that such an attempt to publish this research paper will have been unsuccessful, the Beneficiary must prove to the satisfaction of the Managing Authority and through the submission of sufficient and adequate documentary evidence that such an attempt to publish a research paper in terms of the requirements of this Clause was in fact made. Sufficient and adequate documentary evidence includes evidence that the paper was actually submitted for publication and documentary evidence that the paper was rejected for publication. If the Managing Authority is satisfied with the evidence provided, then the Beneficiary will not be held in breach of this particular obligation.

A copy of all publications must be presented to the Managing Authority before any retention is disbursed.

The Managing Authority appreciates that the attainment of these deliverables may depend on externalities. The Consortium is expected to take these into consideration when submitting their application forms. Although these deliverables are non-compulsory, if quoted as committed deliverables in the Application stage, they must be adhered to.

4. List of Eligible Costs and Ineligible Costs

A grant must not exceed the overall amount which is established at the time of the project selection based on the estimated eligible costs indicated in the Budget Breakdown form.

The Total Eligible Cost is the sum of Eligible Direct and Indirect Costs. Eligible Indirect Costs and Other Operating expenses are calculated at 20% of the direct costs. Requested Funding is calculated as a percentage of the Total Eligible Costs.

Audit fees must form part of the indirect costs and therefore should not be input as a separate budget line item. Direct costs must be rounded to the nearest euro. No changes to the Budget Breakdown Form will be accepted.

Eligible costs are costs actually incurred and claimed by the Beneficiary of a grant which meet all the following criteria:

i. They are incurred between the Start Date and the End Date of the project.
ii. They are necessary for the implementation of the project as outlined in the project proposal which is the subject of the grant.
iii. They are identifiable, verifiable and being recorded in the accounting records of the beneficiary and determined according to the applicable accounting standards of Malta and according to the usual cost accounting practices of the Beneficiary.
iv. They comply with the requirements of applicable tax and social legislation. They are reasonable, justified and comply with the principle of sound financial management, regarding economy and efficiency.
v. Any calls for the recruitment of personnel on a project is to be conducted in a strictly transparent manner and is to include a public call in the form of an online advert and interview process.
vi. Commercial transactions between any applicants or consortium Partners, or between any applicants or a consortium Partner and a company with similar shareholding to a consortium partner, is not allowed. All transactions need to be carried out in line with the arm's length principle outlined within the Definitions (Section 1.1).
vii. Any expenses incurred during the course of the Project must be consistent with the principles of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. Any purchases must be carried out at Arm's length. Commercial transactions between Beneficiaries within the same Project are not allowed.

As a reminder, applicants may opt for one of the two regulations described in Section 2: *de minimis* or GBER. Applicants are required to select their preference within the National Application Form. The sub-sections below list eligible costs under *de minimis* (Section 4.1 and 4.2) and GBER (Section 4.1 and 4.3).

4.1 Common Eligible Costs for both Regulations

Personnel costs

Personnel costs include wages of employees (researchers, technical staff, other research supporting staff) directly engaged by the Applicant to the extent and for the duration of the proposed research project.

i. All employees in respect of whom costs are claimed must be registered with the competent local authorities and covered by a valid contract of direct employment in terms of the national legislation to employment.
ii. The total claimed hours worked by a full-time employee shall not exceed 1720 hours *per annum*. Person hours dedicated to the project can be claimed while respecting this maximum capping. Attention should be paid not to exceed this capping, particularly if researchers work on other funded projects. **Timesheets are to be completed and**

retained for all personnel, including students, as proof of number of hours spent on the project.

iii. Annual stipends of € 6,000 for students reading for a master's degree or € 8,000 for students reading for a doctoral degree. In the case of a part-time post-graduate degree, the respective stipend will be calculated pro-rata and at the discretion of the Managing Authority. For every engaged student, a full-time researcher must be employed by the Applicant.

iv. Personnel costs related to Project Management are capped at 10% of the total Project Value and such effort should be allocated to (and described within) research tasks to be eligible.

v. *Table 1* shows the eligible hourly rates (inclusive of National Insurance, Inland Revenue, and other allowances) and personnel limits per applicant. The personnel hourly rate is calculated using the following formula:

€z = (basic salary + allowances) / yearly workable hours of the employee.

Role in Project	Hourly rates in 2026	Hourly rates in 2027	Hourly rates in 2028	Limits per project
Management or equivalent	Up to €60.78/hour	Up to €63.82/hour	Up to €67.01/hour	Max 2 per project
Senior Researcher[1] or equivalent	Up to €42.84/hour	Up to €44.98/hour	Up to €47.23/hour	Max 2 per project
Researcher[2] or equivalent	Up to €30.69/hour	Up to € 32.22/hour	Up to € 33.83/hour	No limits
Operational, technician, research support assistant or equivalent	Up to €16.83/hour	Up to €17.67/hour	Up to €18.55/hour	No limits

Table 1 Eligible Hourly Rates

The rates stated in the table above are for the years 2026-2028. For subsequent years a 5% increase per year is allowed. Kindly ensure that only hourly rates are provided in the application form. Provided that whereas the Table above specifies maximum hourly rates, the Beneficiary shall ensure that the hourly rate of remuneration payable shall not, at any time, be less than the applicable minimum wage as established by Maltese law, including any applicable Wage Regulation Orders issued under the Employment and Industrial Relations Act (Chapter 452 of

[1] *The term 'senior researcher' is to be used for a postdoctoral researcher with a specialist and high level of local and international experience in the field. Individuals possessing a high level of experience in industry can still be considered.*

[2] *The term 'researcher' is to be used for a Bachelor's, Master's or a Ph.D. degree holder and hence the hourly rate should be equivalent to the degree held by the relevant individual*

the Laws or Malta) or national minimum wage standards, as may be amended from time to time. The Beneficiary undertakes to adjust hourly rates of remuneration accordingly to ensure continued compliance with any changes in the statutory minimum wage.

vi. Personnel in salary brackets that are higher than those noted above will still only be reimbursed at the rates of the eligible brackets above depending on their role in the project.
vii. For personnel who are yet to be recruited for the project, applicants should submit a job description highlighting requirements of the role at the application stage.
viii. Research Organisations (recognised and as defined in Subsidiary Legislation 217.22) shall adhere to the conditions set for engaging and employing researchers from third countries within S.L. 217.22: Conditions of Entry and Residence of Third-Country Nationals for the Purposes of Research, Studies, Training and Voluntary Service in the Mobility Project for Young People: Voluntary Projects Regulations.
ix. The maximum hourly rate (i.e. the highest hourly rate an individual is paid throughout the project duration) and the person hours that will be worked on the project per engaged individual, will have to be noted in the Budget Breakdown Form. In the case of existing personnel, CVs are to be provided. The actual hourly rate of each engaged individual will be reported in financial reports during the monitoring process as per Section 7.

Costs of IP and Knowledge Transfer Activities

These costs include the costs of knowledge transfer activities and patents bought or licensed from outside sources obtained at Arm's length conditions. Such activities should be discussed with the Managing Authority before submission of the application to ensure eligibility.

Subcontracted Activities

Subcontracted activities shall be allowed up to a limit of 25% of the Project Value. Such activities should be discussed with the Managing Authority before submission of the application to ensure eligibility.

Where a component of the project work is a Subcontracted Activity, the following considerations shall apply:

i. The PI shall remain responsible for the timely delivery of the subcontracted tasks.
ii. The PI shall ensure that such a third party is selected in a manner which is transparent, fair and impartial. Partners shall ensure that there is no discrimination between bidders and that all bidders are treated equally and transparently in all calls for quotations.
iii. The PI shall ensure that the attainment of any services or goods respect the procurement criteria listed in Section 4.

Overheads and Other Operating Expenses

Overheads (also known as eligible indirect costs) and other operating expenses are eligible costs if they are incurred directly as a result of the project. These will be covered at 20% of direct eligible costs claimed.

4.2 *De Minimis*-Specific Considerations

Aid Intensity

The financial contribution to a project partner applying under *de minimis* shall be up to 75% of the eligible costs incurred on the project by that project Partner. The Partner must finance the remaining percentage of the eligible costs. It is not possible for a Partner to cover this percentage contribution 'in-kind'.

Travel and Subsistence

Travel and subsistence costs are only accepted under the *De Minimis* regulation.

Type of Meeting	Number of persons funded	Comments
Consortium meeting	Max. of 2 persons per meeting	Within the project period.
International Conference	Max. of 2 persons per event	Max. of one conference every 6 months
'Other' project-related meetings	Max. of 2 persons per occasion	Need to be discussed and approved by the Managing Authority

Eligible costs under this section include the cost of economy flights, public transport and other expenses that have been incurred for the purpose of the project after selection of the most economic solutions. *Per diems* are payable for travel up to a maximum of 14 days in a row.

Instruments, Specialised Equipment and Research Consumables

These costs include the purchase/leasing of instruments and specialised equipment including software. An explanation of the relevance of the instruments and equipment in relation to the project, including specification where applicable, is required. If a specialised laptop/PC is to be purchased, please specify its usage and specifications.

Research consumables must be incurred directly as a result of the project.

The overall value of consumables typically cannot exceed 30% of project value. Proposals with consumables exceeding 30% of the project value need to be discussed at application stage.

4.3 GBER-specific Considerations

Aid Intensity

The aided part of the research and development project shall completely fall within one or more of the following categories (as defined in Section 1.1).

Fundamental Research	Industrial Research	Experimental Development

The financial contribution to a project partner applying under GBER shall be **25%** of the eligible costs incurred on the project by that project partner. The aid intensity can be topped up as follows:

Aid Intensity for Large Undertakings	Top-up according to Undertaking Size		Additional top-up if the project is selected through an open call and involves Effective Collaboration, and Wide Dissemination or making licenses availability, as outlined below.
25%	Small Undertaking	+20%	+25%
	Medium Undertaking	+10%	

The project Partner must finance the remaining percentage of the eligible costs. It is not possible for a Partner to cover this percentage contribution 'In-kind'.

The aid intensity may be increased by 25% if the following conditions are satisfied:

i. Project has been selected by a Member State following an open call to form part of a project jointly designed by **at least three Member States or contracting parties to the EEA Agreement; and**
ii. Project involves Effective Collaboration between undertakings in at least two Member States or contracting parties to the EEA Agreement when the Beneficiary is a SME, or in at least three Member States or contracting parties to the EEA Agreement when the Beneficiary is a large enterprise; **and**
iii. The Project satisfies at least one of the following requirements:
    a. The results of the project are widely disseminated in at least three Member States or contracting parties to the EEA Agreement through conferences, publications, open-access repositories, or free or open-source software. For the results of the project to be considered as being widely disseminated, this must be done through conferences, publications, open access repositories, or free or open-source software at the Beneficiary's **own** expense. **The**

activities to be undertaken to satisfy these criteria must be clearly made visible in the National Application Form.

OR

b. The Beneficiary commits to, on a timely basis, make available licenses for research results of aided R&D projects, which are protected by Intellectual Property rights, at a market price and on non-exclusive and non-discriminatory basis for use by interested parties in the EEA.

Travel-related and Dissemination-related costs are deemed ineligible direct costs under this state aid route.

The amount of assistance granted to participants will not exceed the applicable thresholds laid down in Article 4(1) (i) of Commission Regulation (EU) No. 651/2014, as amended.

For the purposes of calculating aid intensity and eligible costs, all figures used shall be taken before any deduction of tax or other charge. Value added tax charged on eligible costs or expenses that is refundable under the applicable national tax law shall, however, not be taken into account for calculating aid intensity and eligible costs.

The eligible costs shall be supported by documentary evidence which shall be clear, specific and contemporary. The eligible costs shall be discounted to their value at the moment the aid is granted.

Aid payable in the future, including aid payable in several instalments, shall be discounted to its value at the moment it is granted.

The interest rate to be used for discounting purposes shall be the discount rate applicable at the moment the aid is granted.

Instruments, Specialised Equipment and Research Consumables

These costs include the purchase/leasing of instruments and specialised equipment including software. An explanation of the relevance of the instruments and equipment in relation to the project, including specification where applicable, is required. If a specialised laptop/PC is to be purchased, please specify its usage and specifications.

Research consumables must be incurred directly as a result of the project.

The overall value of consumables typically cannot exceed 30% of project value. Proposals with consumables exceeding 30% of the project value need to be discussed at application stage.

Under Regulation B (GBER) of these National Rules for Participation, the costs of instruments and equipment are eligible to the extent and for the period used for the project.

Where such instruments and equipment are not used for their full life for the project**, only the depreciation costs** corresponding to the life of the project, as calculated on the basis of the

generally accepted accounting principles considered as eligible. **The depreciation costs must be verified by a Certified Public Accountant.**

4.4 Ineligible Costs

The following shall be considered as a non-exhaustive list of ineligible costs.

i. Expenses which are recoverable through other funding mechanisms, including recoverable value added tax.
ii. Re-purchase of equipment originally procured through other funding mechanisms.
iii. Personnel hours for travelling and/or overtime.
iv. Opportunity costs related to foregone production and production downtime arising from the allocation of resources to the Project.
v. Standard office equipment and stationery.
vi. Purchase of equipment and services from partners or their subsidiaries.
vii. Any activity related to the reproduction of a commercial product or process by a physical examination of an existing system or from plans, blueprints, detailed specifications or publicly available information.
viii. Expenses related to loans, interest, etc.
ix. Travel and Subsistence and Dissemination-related expenses are ineligible direct costs in relation to applications submitted under Regulation B (GBER).
x. Any cost incurred to submit the proposal.
xi. Any cost incurred before the Start Date and after the End Date of the project.
xii. Any other costs not listed down in Sections 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3

Any line items not seen to be compliant with the nature of the programme will be subtracted from the grant.

5. Evaluation

Applications will be checked for administrative eligibility by the JPI Oceans 'Offshore Freshened Groundwater' Joint Call Secretariat. Applications involving at least one Malta-based applicant will also be checked for administrative eligibility by the Managing Authority. Once the project application is deemed eligible, this will be scientifically evaluated by evaluators engaged by the Joint Call Secretariat. The chosen evaluators work in accordance with their stipulated evaluation criteria as set in the Call Text.

Where errors in the budget are noted during the evaluation process, these will be categorised by Xjenza Malta as major deviations (affecting 10% or over of the requested grant value, or involving significant errors in required documentation) or minor deviations (affecting less than 10% of the requested grant value).

Minor deviations will be corrected, and administratively evaluated. The Beneficiary will be given the opportunity to accept or decline proceeding with the project subject to the required amendments if the application is successful.

Major deviations will be identified by Xjenza Malta. Depending on the nature and severity of the deviation, the Beneficiary may be invited to address the issues within a period determined by the Managing Authority. Failure to submit required corrections where rectification is permitted will result in the application being deemed administratively non-compliant and no longer eligible for consideration. In cases where the deviation is fundamental or prevents proper evaluation of the application, it may be deemed administratively non-compliant immediately.

The Managing Authority may undertake a Due Diligence exercise through its contractors for the purpose of administrative compliance. Further assurances and documentation, such as bank guarantees and an updated Undertaking in Difficulty Form, may be required at the discretion of the Managing Authority. In the event that the Due Diligence assessment establishes a high exposure risk to the Managing Authority, the application will be rejected, or further assurances may be requested from the Applicant for the application to remain under consideration.

Changes to the submitted proposal are not allowed prior to the Grant Agreement, unless requested and/or approved by the Managing Authority.

6. Post Selection Process

6.1 The Grant Agreement

A Grant Agreement will be signed between the successful applicant and the Managing Authority. This Agreement will serve as the basis for project funding and will regulate the transfer of funds to national beneficiaries. Hard copies of the Grant Agreement must be signed and endorsed by the respective legal representative(s) of the potential Beneficiary within 15 days from the date on which the potential Beneficiary receives them. Failure to endorse the Grant Agreement within the stipulated timeframe may result in the withdrawal of the offer for funding.

The Managing Authority reserves the right not to proceed with signing any Grant Agreement if the Managing Authority deems that doing so would be too high an exposure risk.

The Project Contact Point must provide two (2) images related to the project and an abstract upon signing the Grant Agreement. These will be used by the Managing Authority to publicise the award.

6.2 Start Date and End Date

The Project Coordinator with the project Partners, shall decide on a common Start Date for the project. This information needs to be communicated to all the funding bodies involved in the project, to ensure that the national contracts are synchronised to cover all periods of the project.

The pre-determined date as agreed will be stated in the Grant Agreement, in line with Section 6.1. The Start Date must not be later than 15 December 2026.

In view of the nature of the Grant Agreement, the said agreement will not be signed simultaneously by all parties but will be signed by all the parties separately. Each party will signify the date of signing and the Grant Agreement will come into force on the date on which the final signature is made thereon (hereinafter referred to as the "Agreement Date").

Between the Agreement Date and the Start Date, the Project Contact Point should ensure that all activities required for a smooth project start are completed.

To be eligible for funding, all expenses must be incurred between the Start Date and the End Date of the Project.

6.3 Grant Amount

The acceptance of an application does not automatically lead to an award of value that is equal to the amount requested by the applicant. The funding requested may be reduced based on the specific funding regulation applied. It should be noted that the grant amount foreseen by the agreement is a maximum which cannot be increased during Grant Agreement preparation with the Managing Authority.

6.4 Double Funding

Funding under this Programme is made available on condition that the project Beneficiary has not and will not benefit from any other grant or financial assistance of whatever nature, applied for and/ or utilised to cover the same costs and scope which are the subject of the application submitted for funding in terms of the Programme contemplated in these National Rules for Participation. In the case where the application covers work that is part of a larger project, the applicant must submit a table as an appendix to the Application Form that shows a comprehensive list of the items of work and the source of funding for each item.

By signing the Grant Agreement, the Beneficiary is accepting and authorising the Managing Authority to exchange essential information related to the project with other funding agencies, both local and foreign to establish compliance with this condition. Any occurrence of double funding should be communicated in writing to the Managing Authority, prior to the signing of the Grant Agreement and as may arise during the implementation of the project.

7. Funding, Management and Progress Monitoring

7.1 Allocation and Disbursement of Funding

The funding of the project shall be disbursed in the following manner, including both direct and indirect costs:

Pre-Financing	50%
Interim Financing	30%
Retention	20%

Total financial contribution over the lifetime of the project shall not exceed the funding limit as established in the Grant Agreement, irrespective of actual expenditure.

The periodic funding will be allocated according to the following schedule:

i. The Managing Authority will make an initial advance payment (pre-financing) of 50% of the due financial contribution and will include both direct and indirect costs (i.e., total eligible costs).
ii. The Project Contact Point will be required to submit a Technical and a Financial Interim Report to the Managing Authority with details of actual expenditure in the first half of the project, together with an updated forecast of projected expenditure for the remainder of the project. Both reports must be approved by the Managing Authority before proceeding with any disbursements. The Technical Report should include an account of the activities and achievements carried out throughout the reporting period as compared with the contents of the Application (and/or additional Annexes within the Grant Agreement outlining the tasks and deliverables of the Beneficiary) as originally submitted.
iii. After the Interim reporting is reviewed, the Managing Authority will calculate the next due financial contribution based on the Financial Report submitted. This contribution will be calculated as forecast eligible expenditure.
iv. The Managing Authority shall retain 20% of the total Project Grant to be transferred only upon successful completion of the project. This is referred to as the retention money.
v. Following the termination of the project or expiry of the Grant Agreement, the Project Contact Point will be required to submit a Final Technical Report together with a Final Financial Report for the entire project. The Final Financial Report needs to be audited by a certified auditor appointed by the applicant and approved by the Managing Authority once submitted. The audit should determine the total eligible costs and compare these to the funds forwarded. The Technical Report should include an account of the activities and achievements carried out throughout in the lifetime of the project as compared with the contents of the Application form (and/or additional Annexes within the Grant Agreement outlining the tasks and deliverables of the Beneficiary) as originally submitted.

vi. As soon as the verifications and audits are finalised and cleared, the Managing Authority will release the retention money due. In the case of overpayment, the applicant will be required to refund the under-spent amount to the Managing Authority within a specific timeframe, as agreed to with the Managing Authority.

vii. Any changes to the project objectives, work-packages or any other parameter committed to in the application, are to be communicated in writing with clear justification to the Managing Authority prior to the deadline. The written request will be referred to the Unit Director for approval. The Managing Authority will acknowledge receipt and endeavour to reply in a timely manner so that the momentum of the project remains unaffected. Acceptance or otherwise of any changes shall be at the sole discretion of the Managing Authority and its decision shall be binding, final and irrevocable. Any other communication shall not be considered valid or binding.

The Managing Authority reserves the right to alter the funding parameters as deemed appropriate.

7.2 Dissemination and Externalisation

All dissemination and publication of information in relation to the proposal selected for award is to commence following the signing of the Grant Agreement.

Any literature, articles and text material published in relation to the completion of tasks proposed in the project should include the words:

'Project *[Project Name]* is part-financed by Xjenza Malta through the JPI Oceans 'Offshore Freshened Groundwater' Joint Action'

Any websites or printed material related to the project should also include the Managing Authority logo and the JPI Oceans logo.

During the term of Agreement and for five (5) years thereafter, the Applicant shall include and prominently feature the Managing Authority and JPI Oceans in any publicity related to the project.

All publicity material shall be vetted and approved by the Managing Authority **before** publication. In the case where printed material is published without a mention of the initiative and the Managing Authority, the applicant shall be obliged to publish a correction at their own expense in the subsequent issue of the publication. Where any publicity fails to mention the Programme and the Managing Authority, all associated costs will be considered ineligible and the publication will not fulfil any deliverables proposed in the application.

The Managing Authority reserves the right to request that the Beneficiary participates in any Research Conferences or Events to disseminate the project results and the experience in obtaining funding from the Managing Authority.

7.3 Reporting

An Interim **Technical Report** and **Financial Report** are to be presented to the Managing Authority at the mid-point of the project.

On the last day of the project, the Project Contact Point is required to submit an **End of Project Technical Report**. The **End of Project Audited Financial Report** covering the work and expenditure undertaken during the entire project shall need to be submitted up to eight (8) weeks from the stipulated end of project date.

The Project Contact Point shall also set a schedule for periodical progress meetings with the Managing Authority to take place. During such meetings, beneficiaries should verbally update Xjenza Malta on progress via a presentation.

The following example is based on a project timeline of 36 months:

Meetings	Project Timeline*	Reports
Kick-Off Meeting	Month 1	
Progress Meeting	Month 6	
Progress Meeting	Month 12	
Progress Meeting	Month 18	Interim Technical Report
	Month 19	Interim Financial Report
Progress Meeting	Month 24	
Progress Meeting	Month 30	
Progress Meeting	Month 36	End of Project Technical Report
	Month 38	End of Project Financial Report

**The project timeline may vary according to the project duration.*

The Interim Technical and Financial Reports shall contain the following details:

i. An overview of project activity and achievements compared with the originally submitted application.
ii. An account of actual expenditure over the first half of the project compared with the originally submitted budgeted expenditure. All financial reports must be signed by the person responsible for the financial management and assembled as per the instructions in the Grant Agreement.
iii. An updated forecast of project activity and projected achievements for the remaining half of the project.
iv. An updated forecast of projected expenditure for the remaining half of the project.

The End of Project Technical and Financial Reports shall contain the details listed above as well as the financial audited report details as requested below.

The audit will consist of, at least, the following checks:

i. Accounts

ii. Physical inventory
iii. Timesheets and payslips / employee contracts
iv. Receipts for all equipment and consumables
v. Bank statements for the Project Account

The Beneficiary shall appoint an auditor to conduct a detailed financial audit, following the completion of the project. The Managing Authority reserves the right to appoint an auditor to audit the Project Financial Audit as submitted.

The Managing Authority may at any time request supplementary information and documentation on the projects and may request additional progress meetings. The Managing Authority may make such additional enquiries into a project as deemed necessary. Any required documentation not submitted within Interim reports or Final Reports, or documentation not submitted within the specified timeframes, may render the whole project ineligible, and may result in the Managing Authority recovering all funds disbursed across the project.

If the project is found to be in breach of the Grant Agreement or to materially depart from the submitted application, the Managing Authority reserves the right to discontinue the award and the Beneficiary may be required to refund the Grant in part or in full. In any such event, the Managing Authority may also exclude a Beneficiary from participating in future calls.

Project Consortium must comply with the JPI Oceans 'Offshore Freshened Groundwater' Joint Action mandatory reporting requirements and activities as outlined in the Call Text.

7.4 Accountability

Beneficiaries must keep a separate bank account or records, which must be clearly distinguishable from its other accounting records. All relevant expenses must be recorded in this account. All funding payments by the Managing Authority will be deposited in the project bank account.

Eligible expenses must have been determined in accordance with the usual accounting and management principles and practices of the Beneficiary. Direct eligible costs must be backed up with the relevant documentation as specified in the Grant Agreement.

7.5 Project Extensions

Time extension requests are unlikely to be accepted unless these are due to extenuating circumstances that are deemed plausible and conditionally valid by the Managing Authority. Such circumstances need to be unavoidable, and Partners need to provide evidence to the Managing Authority that all efforts and best practice project management have been undertaken to remedy the extraneous circumstances.

If the Managing Authority deems a request for extension as conditionally valid, the Malta-based Principal Investigator would need to communicate it to the Project Coordinator, who in turn will inform all the other funding agencies in the project. The Managing Authority will

validate the extension upon confirmation of approval and consensus from all Partners within the project of the new End Date.

7.6 Budget Transfers

Applicants should note that:

i. Transfers of project funds between line items over the course of the project that are cumulatively less than 20% of the grant value are automatically eligible provided that:
    a. The limits mentioned in Section 4 of these National Rules for Participation are adhered to;
    b. Expenses are exclusively used throughout the project lifetime to the sole benefit of the project;
    c. Requested costs should be eligible as per these National Rules of Participation.
ii. Where transfers of project funds between line items are cumulatively greater than 20% of the grant value, these will be considered as significant alterations to the proposal and will not be eligible.
iii. Any Transfer of project funds shall be reported in the project progress meetings and in the Project Financial Reports, referred to in Section 7.3.

In case of local Maltese consortia, the 20% transfer limit is set for the grant value of the respective Partner.

The structure of the line items will be as follows:

i. Transfers between budget categories will always contribute to the 20% limit.
ii. Each manager will be considered as its own line item (transfers between managers will therefore contribute to the 20% limit)
iii. Research personnel will be considered collectively a single line item (transfers between research personnel will therefore not contribute to the 20% limit)
iv. Equipment having a value of less than €5,000 will be considered a single line item (transfers between equipment having a value less than €5,000, will therefore not contribute to the 20% limit). Equipment having a value of over €5,000 will be considered as its own line item (transfers between equipment over €5,000, will therefore contribute to the 20% limit).
v. Subcontracted activities of having a value of less than €5,000 will be considered jointly as a single line item (transfers between subcontracting having a value less than €5,000, will therefore not contribute to the 20% limit). Subcontracting having a value of over €5,000 will be considered their own line item (transfers between subcontracting over €5,000, will therefore contribute to the 20% limit).
vi. Consumables having a value of less than €5,000 will be considered jointly as a single line item (transfers between consumables under €5,000, will therefore not contribute to the 20% limit). Consumables having a value of over €5,000 will be considered their own line items (transfers between consumables having a value of over €5,000, will therefore contribute to the 20% limit).

vii. Travel will be considered a single line item (transfers between travel will not contribute to the 20% limit).

The term 'own line item' refers to a whole budget category whereas 'single line item' refers to one individual line item within a budget category.

Where equipment/ subcontracting that was originally budgeted at over €5,000, be reduced to less than €5,000 over the course of the project, this will still continue to be considered as an individual line item. Where an item of equipment/subcontracting was originally budgeted at less than €5,000, be increased to over €5,000 over the course of the project, this cost will be converted to an individual line item.

For reference purposes, please find the above transfers in a tabular format:

Will contribute to the 20% limit	**Will not contribute to the 20% limit**
Transfers between different budget categories	Transfers between travel activities
Transfers between managers	Transfers between research personnel
Transfers between items of equipment (over €5,000)	Transfers between items of equipment (under €5,000)
Transfers between subcontracted activities (over €5,000)	Transfers between subcontracted activities (under €5,000)
Transfers between consumables (over €5,000)	Transfers between consumables (under €5,000)

7.7 Supervening Circumstances

The Project Contact Point is obliged to immediately advise the Managing Authority of any internal or extraneous significant event which might affect the validity or implementation of the project. This obligation applies to the entire period between the submission of the Project Application and the completion of the project.

The Managing Authority, at its own discretion, shall either give such directives as it deems necessary for the furtherance of the project or re-assess the project in its entirety accordingly.

Failure on the part of the Project Contact Point to respect this obligation may lead the Managing Authority to suspend or terminate funding for the project and request a refund.

If during the project a partner withdraws from the Project Consortium, the Beneficiary should immediately advise the Managing Authority. In this event, the relevant articles of the Project Consortium Agreement and the National Grant Agreement shall apply.

7.8 Default

Where the implementation of a project becomes impossible or implementation is not completed, the Managing Authority shall be entitled to take any action it deems necessary, including, but not limited to, the withdrawal of funding for the project and the collection of refunds of money already paid out. A similar course of action may be followed if a project is in default as a result of not meeting one or more of its obligations in terms of the Grant Agreement.

In the event of default on the part of the Beneficiary the Managing Authority may issue a written notice to the Beneficiary outlining the default, the corrective action to be taken and granting a rectification period of one month. The Managing Authority may also issue a second written notice of default granting a rectification period in respect of the same default.

7.9 Interpretation of Rules

This document endeavours to establish comprehensive and unambiguous rules governing participation in this initiative. However, should circumstances arise where the rules are inadequate, unclear, ambiguous, or conflicting, the Managing Authority shall exercise its discretion in the interpretation of the rules through the setting up of an *ad hoc* committee.

These current rules repeal any rules previously issued and constitute exclusively the entire rules issued by the Managing Authority.

In the event of a conflict between the Grant Agreement and these National Rules for Participation, the Grant Agreement shall take precedence.

8. Confidentiality of Submissions

All project application submissions shall be treated in the strictest confidence.

Without prejudice to the generality of the above it is only the name of the entity, the Project Contact Point, the title of proposal and the abstract which may in the course of the process be published.

However, all project applications will be passed on in their entirety to the external evaluators and due diligence experts, who are bound by confidentiality and who shall also be required to declare that they do not have any conflict of interest in reviewing the individual proposals.

The collection of data by Xjenza Malta through the application for aid under the Programme, submitted by the applicant and the subsequent processing of said data by Xjenza Malta to evaluate the data subject's request for aid under the Programme and the storage of said data shall at all times be in accordance with:

i. The provisions of these National Rules for Participation;
ii. Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty, as amended by Commission Regulation (EU) No 2017/1084 of 14 June 2017 amending Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 as regards aid for port and airport infrastructure, notification thresholds for aid for culture and heritage conservation and for aid for sport and multifunctional recreational infrastructures, and regional operating aid schemes for outermost regions and amending Regulation (EU) No 702/2014 as regards the calculation of eligible costs, by Commission Regulation (EU) 2020/972 of 2 July 2020 amending Regulation (EU) No 1407/2013 as regards its prolongation and amending Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 as regards its prolongation and relevant adjustments, by Commission Regulation (EU) 2021/1237 of 23 July 2021 amending Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty, and by Commission Regulation (EU) 2023/1315 of 23 June 2023 amending Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty and Regulation (EU) 2022/2473 declaring certain categories of aid to undertakings active in the production, processing and marketing of fishery and aquaculture products compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty(for projects implemented in line with Regulation B of these National Rules for Participation).
iii. Commission Regulation (EU) 2023/2831 of 13 December 2023 on the application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union to de minimis aid (the de minimis Regulation), for projects implemented in line with Regulation A of these National Rules for Participation).
iv. Data Protection Act (CAP 586 of the Laws of Malta) and Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data and repealing Directive 95/46/EC (General Data Protection Regulation).
v. The legitimate basis to process personal data submitted by the data subject by virtue of his/her written application for aid is Regulation 6 (1)(b) of the General Data Protection Regulation ("GDPR"), as 'processing is necessary in order to take steps at the request of the data subject prior to entering into a contract'.

9. Annex 1 – Regulation A: de minimis aid

Assistance provided under Regulation A of these National Rules for Participation is in line with the terms and conditions of Commission Regulation EU 2023/2831 of 13 December 2023 on the application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union to de minimis aid (OJ L, 2023/2831, 15.12.2023) (herein referred to as de minimis Regulation (link below).

The de minimis Regulation stipulates that a Single Undertaking cannot receive more than €300,000 in de minimis aid over 3 years, including de minimis aid from measures offered by entities other than the Managing Authority. The three-year period is assessed on a rolling basis.

Any *de minimis* aid received which is above the established threshold will have to be recovered, with interest from the undertaking receiving the aid.

This Regulation applies to aid granted to undertakings in all sectors, with the exception of:

i. Aid granted to undertakings active in the primary production of fishery and aquaculture products.
ii. Aid granted to undertakings active in the processing and marketing of fishery and aquaculture products, where the amount of the aid is fixed on the basis of price or quantity of products purchased or put on the market.
iii. Aid granted to undertakings active in the primary production of agricultural products.
iv. Aid granted to undertakings active in the processing and marketing of agricultural products, in one of the following cases:
    a. Where the amount of the aid is fixed on the basis of the price or quantity of such products purchased from primary producers or put on the market by the undertakings concerned;
    b. Where the aid is conditional on being partly or entirely passed on to primary producers.
v. Aid granted to export-related activities towards third countries or Member States, namely aid directly linked to the quantities exported, the establishment and operation of a distribution network or other current expenditure linked to the export activity.
vi. Aid contingent upon the use of domestic good and services over imported goods and services.

Where an undertaking is active in the sectors referred to in points (i), (ii), (iii) or (iv) above, and is also active in one or more of the other sectors falling within the scope of the *de minimis* Regulation or has other activities falling within the scope of the *de minimis* Regulation, the *de minimis* Regulation shall apply to aid granted in respect of the latter sectors or activities, provided that the Managing Authority ensures, by relying on appropriate means such as separation of activities or separation of accounts, that the activities in the sectors excluded

from the scope of this Regulation do not benefit from the *de minimis* aid granted in accordance with this Regulation.

The applicable rules on cumulation of aid as outlined in Article 5 of the de minimis Regulation (link below) will be respected.

The *de minimis* declaration form indicating any other *de minimis* aid received and/or applied for over the applicable three-year period, must be filled in and submitted together with the application form.

In line with Article 6(1) of the de minimis Regulation, as of 1 January 2026, information on de minimis aid granted under this scheme shall be made publicly available in the central register at national or Union Level.

The following information shall be made public:

i. The identification of the Beneficiary,
ii. The aid amount,
iii. The granting date,
iv. The aid instrument, and
v. The sector involved based on the statistical classification of economic activities in the Union ('NACE classification').

More information on the de minimis regulation can be found on the following link: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2023/2831

10. Annex 2 - Regulation B: General Block Exemption Regulation

Assistance provided under Regulation B of these National Rules for Participation is in line with the terms and conditions of Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 of 17th June 2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty, as amended by Commission Regulation (EU) No 2017/1084 of 14 June 2017 amending Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 as regards aid for port and airport infrastructure, notification thresholds for aid for culture and heritage conservation and for aid for sport and multifunctional recreational infrastructures, and regional operating aid schemes for outermost regions and amending Regulation (EU) No 702/2014 as regards the calculation of eligible costs, by Commission Regulation (EU) 2020/972 of 2 July 2020 amending Regulation (EU) No 1407/2013 as regards its prolongation and amending Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 as regards its prolongation and relevant adjustments, by Commission Regulation (EU) 2021/1237 of 23 July 2021 amending Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty, and by Commission Regulation (EU) 2023/1315 of 23 June 2023 amending Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty and Regulation (EU) 2022/2473 declaring certain categories of aid to undertakings active in the production, processing and marketing of fishery and aquaculture products compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty, and as may be subsequently amended, referred to as the General Block Exemption Regulation, GBER [*link below*], particularly Article 25 thereof.

Assistance will not be granted if the aid is:

i. Related to export activities towards third countries or Member States, namely aid directly linked to quantities exported, to the establishment and operation of a distribution network or to the other current expenditure linked to export activity.
ii. Contingent upon the use of domestic in preference to imported goods.
iii. Granted in the sector of processing and marketing of agricultural products, in the following cases:
    a. Where the amount of the aid is fixed on the basis of the price or quantity of such products purchased from primary producers or put on the market by the undertakings concerned;
    b. Where the aid is conditional on being partly or entirely passed on to primary producers.
iv. Granted in favour of a beneficiary which is subject to an outstanding recovery order following a previous Commission decision declaring an aid granted by Malta illegal and incompatible with the internal market.
v. Granted in favour of an undertaking in difficulty defined in terms of Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014, as amended.

It will be ensured that this Programme will not entail by itself, by the conditions attached to it or by its financing method, a non-severable violation of Union law. In particular:

a) the granting of aid is not subject to the obligation for the beneficiary to have its headquarters in Malta or to be predominantly established in Malta. However, the requirement to have an establishment or branch in Malta at the moment of payment of the aid, is allowed;
b) the granting of aid is not subject to the obligation for the beneficiary to use nationally produced goods or national services;
c) the Programme does not restrict the possibility for the beneficiaries to exploit the research, development and innovation results in other Member States.

In determining whether the applicable notification thresholds and the maximum aid intensities are respected, the total amount of State aid for the aided activity or project or undertaking shall be considered.

Where EU funding centrally managed by the institutions, agencies, joint undertakings or other bodies of the EU that is not directly or indirectly under the control of the Member State is combined with State aid, only the latter shall be considered for determining whether notification thresholds and maximum aid intensities or maximum aid amounts are respected, provided that the total amount of public funding granted in relation to the same eligible costs does not exceed the most favourable funding rate laid down in the applicable rules of Union law.

Aid granted under this incentive may only be cumulated with:

i. Any other State aid, if those measures concern different identifiable eligible costs.

For any individual aid awarded in excess of €100,000 (or for beneficiaries active in primary agricultural production or in the fishery and aquaculture sector, each individual aid award exceeding €10,000), the details of the Beneficiary, the aid awarded, and the project details shall be published as provided for in Article 9 of the General Block Exemption Regulation.

More information on the GBER can be found on the following links: Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty as amended by Commission Regulation (EU) No 2017/1084 of 14 June 2017 amending Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 as regards aid for port and airport infrastructure, notification thresholds for aid for culture and heritage conservation and for aid for sport and multifunctional recreational infrastructures, and regional operating aid schemes for outermost regions and amending Regulation (EU) No 702/2014 as regards the calculation of eligible costs, by Commission Regulation (EU) 2020/972 of 2 July 2020 amending Regulation (EU) No 1407/2013 as regards its prolongation and amending Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 as regards its prolongation and relevant adjustments, by Commission Regulation (EU) 2021/1237 of 23 July 2021 amending Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in

application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty, by Commission Regulation (EU) 2023/1315 of 23 June 2023 amending Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty and Regulation (EU) 2022/2473 declaring certain categories of aid to undertakings active in the production, processing and marketing of fishery and aquaculture products compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty, and as may be subsequently amended.