



Brussels  
MARE.A.3/IV

**Subject: Smart Specialization Strategies (S3) – Information to sustainable blue economy stakeholders on the call for S3 partnerships**

Dear Sir, Dear Madam,

Innovation and technological change in the EU blue economy are at the foundation of smart and sustainable development of regions and companies alike. In this rapidly evolving context, **Smart Specialization Strategies (S3)** are one of the key tools enabling regions to focus investment on research, development and innovation in the areas showing greater economic and competitive potential.

To harness this potential, last year the European Commission (DG MARE in close cooperation with DG REGIO) launched a **S3 Thematic Platform dedicated to Sustainable Blue Economy**. This Platform allows for a continuous support to EU blue economy stakeholders, providing a structure to foster the creation of an interregional network of thematic S3 partnerships working together in shared smart specialisation areas. **Thematic S3 partnerships** operate with a bottom-up approach, being initiated, developed and led by the regions themselves, in close collaboration with stakeholders from industry and business organizations, research institutions, academia and civil society.

To encourage the creation of these partnerships, DG REGIO recently launched [a Call for expression of interest for new S3 partnerships, which covers also the creation of sustainable blue economy partnerships](#). Through this call, regional authorities can express their interest to the Commission in forming a partnership under the S3 Sustainable Blue Economy Platform, bringing together stakeholders from across the EU interested in exploring new blue economy value chains with high innovation potential.

As a region flagging blue economy as a priority area in your S3 strategy or a stakeholder interested in smart specialisation, **we would like to encourage you to participate in this Call**. The Call represents a key opportunity to build on common interests and strengths in a particular blue economy sector, looking beyond regional borders for collaboration, complementary expertise and new insights. **Please note that the 2<sup>nd</sup> cut-off date by when to submit a partnership application is 30 September 2023.**

For ease of reference, we **enclose** the outcomes of the stakeholder brokerage sessions DG MARE organized last year to identify blue economy areas with high innovation and Smart specialization potential. The brokerage sessions targeted five specific sectors, namely: fisheries, aquaculture, marine renewable energy, coastal and maritime tourism, and blue biotechnology. We encourage you take these outcomes into consideration should you

submit a partnership application. However, we will welcome submissions also on other blue economy-related topics with promising prospects for interregional cooperation (i.e., energy transition and decarbonization of the fisheries and aquaculture sector, sustainable and resilient seafood systems, etc.).

Furthermore, we would like to recall that, with the launch of **the Smart Specialisation Community of Practice (S3 CoP)**, the EU's main source of support and knowledge sharing on the design and implementation of S3 strategies, the Commission has strengthened the overall support system for S3 partnerships.

By forming a partnership, you will be able to benefit from a wide range of services under the S3 CoP, including, among others:

- Training and capacity building on interregional collaboration,
- Guidance to set up interregional governance models,
- Targeted support to enhance the regional engagement of quadruple helix stakeholders,
- Support in the search for relevant funding opportunities for interregional collaboration projects.

We highly appreciate your valuable contribution in the process of building a network of S3 sustainable blue economy partnerships across the EU and would like to encourage you to engage with other regional partners in shared smart specialisation initiatives.

In cooperation with S3 CoP secretariat and DG REGIO, we will organise in September **an online info session dedicated to sustainable blue economy**, where the partnership application process, services and best practices will be presented to regions and stakeholders interested in joining the S3 Sustainable Blue Economy Platform. This info session will be organised in view of the S3 Forum, taking place on 28-29 November in Barcelona, which will gather S3 practitioners from all over Europe to discuss S3 policy and implementation. **An invitation to join the online info session on S3 for sustainable blue economy will be sent towards the end of August.**

Should you have any questions or require further information, we will be happy to provide our support. Please do not hesitate to contact us at [MARE-S3-SBE@ec.europa.eu](mailto:MARE-S3-SBE@ec.europa.eu), with [Irene.VECCHIATO@ec.europa.eu](mailto:Irene.VECCHIATO@ec.europa.eu), [Eleni.HATZIYANNI@ec.europa.eu](mailto:Eleni.HATZIYANNI@ec.europa.eu), and S3 CoP Secretariat [partnerships@s3-cop.eu](mailto:partnerships@s3-cop.eu) in cc.

Yours faithfully,

(e-signed)

Christos ECONOMOU  
Head of Unit

Enclosure: Stakeholders' thematic priorities for S3 partnerships.