



REPUBBLICA ITALIANA

Regione Siciliana

Assessorato del Territorio e dell'Ambiente

Dipartimento dell'Ambiente

COOPERATION WORKING ARRANGEMENT (“the CWA”)

BETWEEN

the Horizon Europe Mission “Restore our Ocean & Waters by 2030”

represented by Marc Lemaitre, Director-General,
European Commission, Directorate-General for Research & Innovation

AND

Sicily Region

represented by Calogero Beringheli, General Director – Regional Department of
Environment

(hereinafter referred to collectively as "Participants")

Background

- Research & Innovation (“R&I”) is a priority for the programming of European Funds 2021- 2027 and namely: (i) the European Regional Development Fund (“ERDF”); (ii) the Cohesion Fund (“CF”); (iii) the European Social Fund Plus (“ESF+”); (iv) the Just Transition Fund (“JTF”) and (v) any other national/regional funds, including the Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3) and NRRP (as defined below) (hereinafter referred to collectively as “N/R Funds”)¹;
- The ERDF and in general the N/R Funds contribute to strengthening the economic, social and territorial cohesion of the European Union. More specifically, the ERDF Operational Programme (“ERDF Operational Programme”) and the N/R Operational Programme (“N/R Operational Programme”) will contribute to promote projects in the field of environment, supporting R&I and fostering European competitiveness and the greener and low carbonisation transitioning, according to the European Green Deal² and the European Climate Law³;
- The Member States and Regional Authorities implementing the ERDF and in general the N/R Fund are required to ensure their coordination with, among others, the Work Programme of the European Mission ‘Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030’⁴ (‘the Mission’), as well as to facilitate synergies and leverage complementarities with other Union programmes, such as Horizon Europe (“HE”), while identifying potential emerging risks and cost savings;
- The specific objectives of the Mission under Horizon Europe are to protect and restore marine and freshwaters biodiversity and ecosystems, to reduce pollution, and to make the blue economy carbon-neutral and circular;
- The Implementation Plan of the Mission⁵ requires seeking and maximising synergies and, where appropriate, possibilities for additional funding from relevant activities and programmes at Union, national and regional level, in particular with those supporting the deployment and uptake of innovative solutions, training, education and regional development, such as the CF and/or the National Recovery and Resilience Plans under Next Generation UE (“NRRP”);
- The Participants intend to promote and support synergies between ERDF and other N/R Funds and N/R Operational Programme managed by the Region and Horizon Europe funding within the Mission’s framework, in line with the applicable EU regulations and European Commission (‘EC’) guidance as well as with the EC Synergy Notice.⁶

1 More information available here : [Info regio - Available budget of Cohesion Policy 2021-2027 \(europa.eu\)](https://info.regio.europa.eu/budgetary/information/policies/available-budget-of-cohesion-policy-2021-2027)

2 https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en

3 https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu-action/european-climate-law_en

4 COM(2021)609 Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on European Missions

5 [Final outline implementation plans \(europa.eu\)](https://info.regio.europa.eu/budgetary/information/policies/available-budget-of-cohesion-policy-2021-2027)

6 Commission Notice Synergies between Horizon Europe and ERDF programmes 2022/C 421/03, C/2022/7307, OJ C 421, 4.11.2022, p. 7.

- The Participants share the common objective of strengthening their cooperation in several areas of the Mission's objectives and enablers.

- Sicily Region places innovation and competitiveness at the centre of its economic development policies, and namely:

a) in the regional smart specialisation strategy for innovation for 2021-2027 which articulates according to 7 Priority Thematic Areas, of which one is the Blue Growth;

b) in the ERDF/ESF programmes 2021-2027 of Sicily, with particular reference to the ERDF Strategic Objective n. 1 "*A more competitive and intelligent Sicily*", Strategic Objective n. 2 "*A greener Sicily*"; Strategic Objective n. 5 *A multimodal and sustainable urban mobility in Sicily*; and the ESF+ Priority 2 "*Education and Training*", Priority 5 "*Innovative social actions*".

c) In the Regional Strategy for Sustainable Development - Agenda 2030

- Sicily Region has a strategic role in supporting the transformation towards a sustainable Ocean & Waters Specifically, the Regional Smart Specialisation Strategy identifies Blue Growth as one of its priority thematic areas. Furthermore, the Sicily ERDF programme 2021-2027, intends to contribute to the pursuit of the objectives of the WESTMED basin strategy and the EUSAIR strategy. In particular, the areas in which it is possible to envisage the activation of synergies concern the support for the blue economy, especially with reference to aspects inherent to research and innovation, the protection of resources, the protection of the marine habitat and the management of risks for the prevention of pollution of the Mediterranean.

- According to the decision of the regional government, the Department of Environment is responsible for the governance and coordination of the various institutional bodies involved in participating in the Mission's initiatives in Sicily.

- The Participants intend to promote and support synergies between ERDF and other N/R Funds and N/R Operational Programme managed by Sicily Region and Horizon Europe funding in the framework of Horizon Europe Mission Ocean & Waters, in line with the applicable EU regulations and EC guidance as well as with the EC Synergy Notice.

- The Participants share the common objective of strengthening their cooperation in several areas of sustainable Ocean and Waters R&I, while contributing to the achievement of the Mission's objectives and targets, as set forth by the European Climate Law⁷, the EU Action Plan: 'Towards Zero Pollution for Air, Water and Soil'⁸, the European Green Deal⁹, and the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030¹⁰.

7 https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu-action/european-climate-law_en

8 https://environment.ec.europa.eu/strategy/zero-pollution-action-plan_en

9 See footnote 5

10 https://environment.ec.europa.eu/strategy/biodiversity-strategy-2030_en

The Participants intend to proceed as follows:

1. PURPOSE

1.1 The purpose of the CWA is to establish a non-binding framework for strategic cooperation on the implementation of the Mission aimed at maximising synergies between the Participants and specifically between the N/R Operational Programme supported by European/National/Regional funds and managed by the Sicily Region and the Mission Work Programme and related actions. This is in the interest of Sicily Region aligning regional objectives, R&I priorities, R&I topics and resources to contribute to the objectives and enablers of the Mission and Mission Charter ¹¹actions (whether applicable) as well as to the Mission Implementation Plan and complementarities identified by the Participants.

1.2 The CWA also aims at exploring potential possibilities for additional funding from relevant activities and programmes at EU, national, and regional level, in particular those supporting the deployment and uptake of innovative solutions, training, and regional development which are key to achieving greater scientific, socio-economic and environmental results in line with the Mission's objectives.

2. AREAS OF COOPERATION

The cooperation envisaged under this CWA encompasses the following:

2.1 The Mission intends to support the Sicily Region in the technical alignment of its regional R&I programmes, investments and expenditures from the N/R Funds which are relevant for the Mission, its Work Programme and its overall objectives and enablers, as stated in the Mission Implementation Plan. To this end, the Participants intend to establish such a technical alignment.

2.2 In line with the Horizon Europe Regulation¹², the Mission intends to underpin the synergy mechanisms envisaged in the ERDF and in the N/R Funds that enable interested Regions/MS to build synergies and complementarities with Horizon Europe and to establish operational cooperation by realising synergies and maximising leverage and impact in the use of public funding. To this end, the Participants share the view that it is crucial to establish a common cooperation framework with the aim of supporting and complementing existing and future activities at regional level.

2.3 The Participants intend to establish a technical alignment and to identify specific regional mechanisms to trigger synergies under the ERDF Operational Programme, the N/R Operational Programme, as well as under the National/Regional Smart Specialisation Strategy ("S3") and other relevant national/regional specific programme/strategy relevant

11 https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe/eu-missions-horizon-europe/restore-our-ocean-and-waters_en

12 Regulation (EU) 2021/695 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 April 2021 establishing Horizon Europe – the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, OJ L 170, 12.5.2021, p. 1–68.

for the Mission objectives and enablers. These mechanisms should foster excellence and aim for impactful results to contribute to the Mission objectives and enablers; under such mechanisms, an increased coordination between public authorities' strategies and funding schemes should be pursued as well as informing the stakeholders of the existence of such mechanisms.

3. MODES OF COOPERATION

Through this CWA the Participants hereby envisage to:

3.1 Establish a framework for strategic cooperation between the Participants and their respective technical programmes and funding instruments through among others:

- a) the definition of both legal, financial and Operational Mechanisms ("**OMs**") to ensure effective cooperation between the Participants and implementation of synergies based on the provisions of this CWA and the EC Synergy Notice;
- b) the elaboration of a regional Common Technical Roadmap ("**Common TR**") aligned to the Implementation Plan and the Mission objectives and enablers. The Common TR aims at identifying the relevant national/regional investments, R&I technical areas/streams and R&I topics on which to align activities, complementary projects and funding to be supported by the Sicily Region under its own programmes and/or funding instruments ("**N/R Funding Schemes**");
- c) the organisation of meetings among representatives of the Participants to develop and supervise the implementation of the Common TR, to develop and supervise the preparation and the subsequent implementation of a regional Common TR and to ensure the necessary strategic administrative and operational support to co-design and implement the synergies mechanisms for the successful implementation of the OMs.

3.2 Research on the availability of N/R funding resources and their possible allocation for the priority actions defined in the Common TR, then analysing the viability of specific funding instruments/ schemes, subject to the available resources, for their implementation such as, among others:

- a) N/R R&I calls/funding schemes to officially be labelled and aligned to the Mission Work Programmes to contribute to shared objectives and to provide financial support to projects and actions under R&I streams and topics as identified in the Common TR. The Region's Calls ("**RCs**") should implement those R&I topics and ensure technical alignment with the relevant Mission funded projects and Mission Charter actions. To this end, the Mission Work Programme and any other relevant technical input could be made available, where possible to Sicily Region for uptake under the RCs.

Moreover, to ensure the complementarity and technical alignment of activities, the EC may provide, when possible and if appropriate, technical support as the EU expert to the Sicily Region's evaluation process.

- b) N/R Funding Schemes to make the calls more consistent so that they can better contribute to Mission Work Programme priorities and objectives, to support projects/activities that complement, support, and exploit activities funded by the Mission by making use of the N/R Funds. To this purpose, the Sicily Region could make use under its funding scheme and application procedure of the results of the European technical evaluations performed under the Horizon Europe rules to evaluate those complementary projects/activities.
- c) N/R Funding Schemes to provide regional financial support to local demonstration and other test activities envisaged in the Mission Work Programme;
- d) N/R infrastructural investments to support the integration and deployment of Mission solutions funded under the Mission Work Programme;
- e) to include in the regional competences and skills development programmes, specific actions relevant for training and to support the transformation of the regional supply chain and competences, and regional capabilities to contribute to the Mission objectives and enablers.

4. COOPERATION ACTIVITIES

4.1 The Participants intend to jointly ensure the monitoring of the implementation of the CWA during the entire duration of the cooperation and to regularly exchange information on the synergy mechanisms put in place. Any reporting should at least indicate the number of projects funded per technical areas, the number of stakeholders involved, national/regional funding allocated to calls/funding schemes and to projects and the overall funding leverage achieved in order to ensure the effective implementation of the Common TR, and should provide information on the timely undertaking of possible adjustments, improvements and updates over the time period.

4.2 To maximize impact of the cooperation under this CWA the Mission will collaborate, as appropriate and subject to available resources, with Sicily Region for:

- a) the preparation and co-design of the Common TR, to be aligned with Mission objectives and enablers;
- b) the identification and proposal of R&I streams and topics and complementary activities to be considered by Sicily Region for launch under the RCs and under its N/R Funding Schemes;
- c) the co-design of the most appropriate OMs and will support its implementation to ensure technical alignment;
- d) support the regional promotion and dissemination of the Mission and its activities and calls and support the mutual dissemination of information to its stakeholders' communities of the CWA and of its synergy mechanisms and opportunities for the stakeholders.

5. NON-BINDING NATURE

5.1 The CWA is a statement of intent with non-binding, non-enforceable intentions declared therein and a non-binding nature. The Participants intend to fulfil their tasks under this CWA on a best-effort basis and in good faith.

5.2 The CWA does not modify or supersede any relevant EU law or any national laws nor does it affect any provisions under other multilateral or bilateral agreements in force and applicable between and to the Participants.

5.3 The CWA does not apply to any third party and does not create any rights and obligations to it.

5.4 The Participants acknowledge that this CWA does not imply a requirement to set up any legal entity, neither does it seek to establish any relationships of a corporate or similar nature between the Participants.

6. GOVERNANCE AND IMPLEMENTATION

6.1 The CWA is expected to be implemented by regular consultation between the Participants, acting in good faith.

6.2 For the implementation of the CWA:

- a) it is expected to be governed and steered at strategic level by the European Commission Director-General of the Directorate-General for Research and Innovation or a delegated senior official of the European Commission and by the General Director of the Sicily Region – Department of Environment.
- b) day-to-day coordination and monitoring are expected to be entrusted to a Working Group (“WG”) by means of, for instance, exchange of e-mails between the Participants and meetings in person, virtual meetings or meetings in hybrid form as appropriate. The WG will be made up of a representative or representatives from both Participants. Disagreements relating to the implementation of the CWA should be solved amicably through dialogues between the Participants.

6.3 The Participants intend to designate one person as point of contact for any issue pertaining to the implementation of the CWA. Such points of contact may subdelegate their tasks to another representative. All written communications between the Participants in connection with the CWA should be addressed to the point of contact and to their respective representatives, where applicable.

7. CONFIDENTIALITY AND PRIVACY

7.1 The Participants acknowledge that they are bound by their relevant applicable rules and own legal framework and contracts, and that any information, personal data and

documents exchanged under the CWA will only be used for the purpose herein mentioned or as otherwise required by applicable law.

7.2 Any personal data included in or related to the CWA, including to its implementation, shall be processed by the Participants in compliance with the applicable EU and national law on the protection of personal data.

8. IP RIGHTS

8.1 Nothing in this CWA should be interpreted as granting a licence or permission to either of the Participants concerning the intellectual property of the other Participant. Intellectual property rights arising from or relating to the cooperation between the Participants should be the subject matter of a separate agreement between them.

9. APPLICABILITY, MODIFICATION AND TERMINATION

9.1 The CWA should become effective on the date of the last signature by the Participants. It remains in effect until the end of the Mission (i.e. 2030) unless it is discontinued earlier. Considering that timing for the ending of the Mission goes beyond the current programming period, the CWA cannot also prejudice the future Cohesion Policy as well as Research and Innovation programming mechanisms (after 2027).

9.2 This CWA may be modified in writing at any time expressed in an exchange of letters between the European Commission Director-General of the Directorate-General for Research and Innovation and the General Director of the Sicily Region – Department of Environment. The Participants may jointly decide in writing to make such modifications to extend the scope of the intended cooperation laid down in points 2 and 3 or to include additional core areas of cooperation in point 4.

9.3 This CWA may be discontinued earlier by either of the Participants providing six (6) months' written notification. If the CWA is terminated by either party, the Participants intend to use their best efforts to mitigate any adverse effects to any ongoing joint projects or activities.

For the European Commission

Marc Lemaître

Director-General
Directorate-General for Research &
Innovation

Date _____

For the Sicily Region

Calogero Beringheli

General Director of the Sicily Region –
Department of Environment

Date _____