



New European Competitiveness Fund (and Horizon Europe) sets course towards a resilient, competitive and sustainable waterborne sector

Waterborne Technology Platform welcomes the proposal of the European Commission for an ambitious EU budget, which includes dedicated investments in the European waterborne sector.

Brussels, 21 July 2025

On 16 July 2025, the European Commission published its [Multiannual Financial Framework](#) (MFF) proposal for the period 2028 – 2034. The proposal includes, amongst others, a budget to drive prosperity via competitiveness, research and innovation, by means of the European Competitiveness Fund (ECF) and Horizon Europe. In addition, a proposal for the next Connecting Europe Facility Programme has been published, to achieve a smart, resilient, decarbonised and sustainable transport network.

The European Competitiveness Fund is a new instrument, and will focus on specific policy windows, including “clean transition and decarbonization”. This policy window supports investments in the European waterborne sector to achieve clean, multimodal and digitalised, safe transport and mobility solutions (including vessels) and infrastructures (including ports), systems and operations. Furthermore, investment, innovation and modernisation are anticipated in sustainable blue economy sectors such as shipbuilding and shipping, offshore energy, and blue tech.

Horizon Europe, the EU’s successor to its current research, development and innovation programme, aims to strengthen its scientific and technological foundations, enhance the circulation and uptake of knowledge, technology and innovation and to mobilise public and private investments across the full research and innovation chain, from fundamental research to market commercialisation. Support to achieve the objectives of the ECF can be provided through collaborative research and innovation activities in Horizon Europe. This also includes contributions to European Partnerships in the framework of Horizon Europe. According to the proposal, European Partnerships are seen as an essential tool to deliver on industrial involvement and investment in collaborative research and innovation, and they should contribute to the specific objectives of the ECF policy windows.

The European waterborne sector is a dynamic ecosystem, featuring a diverse array of public and private stakeholders. These stakeholders include classification societies, shipbuilders, shipowners (both maritime and inland navigation), equipment manufacturers, ports, infrastructure and service providers (e.g. dredging), as well as universities and research institutes. While large enterprises play a key role in the development and innovation in the value chain, small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) form the largest part of the EU waterborne sector and play a crucial role in the sector and the broader European economy.

The various stakeholder groups offer a wide range of services, trades and products, with the global fleet categorized by ship types and services based on power requirements and autonomy. These categories include **inland waterway transport vessels, ferries, short sea, cruise, intercontinental and offshore ships as well as underwater and unmanned vehicles**. There are also distinctions between liner and tramp shipping and their respective business models, as well as between retrofitting existing vessels and building new ones. Ports are equally important, functioning as multimodal hubs that facilitate the movement of goods and passengers and support a wide range of economic activities, including shipbuilding, maintenance, logistics and energy production. Finally, the waterborne sector is a key



solutions provider for the broader blue economy, contributing to areas such as the development and production of offshore platform technologies, the design, production, maintenance and operation of specialised vessels and technology leadership in the underwater domain, e.g. underwater unmanned vehicles.

The European waterborne sector is committed to mobilizing significant investments in research, development and innovation, education, training and skills development, and deployment across the full value and supply chain, including SMEs, start-ups, and regional actors. This will significantly contribute to achieving the objectives of the upcoming industrial waterborne and port strategies.

Jaap Gebraad, Secretary General, Waterborne TP, said: *“The Waterborne Technology Platform welcomes the proposal for the EU budget for the period 2028 – 2034. The investments in research, development, innovation and its deployment, will significantly contribute to achieving technology leadership. Technology leadership will be a key building block of the upcoming industrial waterborne and port strategies. Currently, the Waterborne Technology Platform is coordinating the private side of the European Partnership on Zero-Emission Waterborne Transport. This Partnership has a leverage effect of 1:6; for every Euro invested via Horizon Europe, the sector is investing six Euros. This is the result of a joint and coordinated approach to achieve clear targets. It is essential to continue to this co-programmed Partnership with a clear focus on building a resilient, competitive and sustainable waterborne sector. We represent an interconnected, interdependent ecosystem, including SMEs and start-ups, and the sector's commitment will act as a driver to push our next Partnership to implement the industrial waterborne and ports strategies. We are currently developing technology roadmaps detailing the research, development, innovation and deployment avenues to achieve the objectives laid down in our recently published [Strategic Research Agenda](#). We are looking forward to shaping the content of Horizon Europe, the ECF and the upcoming strategies, jointly with the European Commission Services and Members States with a view to ensuring a resilient, competitive and sustainable European waterborne sector.”*

WATERBORNE TP has been set up as an industry-oriented Technology Platform to establish a continuous dialogue between all waterborne stakeholders, such as classification societies, shipbuilders, shipowners, maritime equipment manufacturers, infrastructure and service providers, universities or research institutes, and with the EU Institutions, including Member States (www.waterborne.eu). The members of Waterborne TP comprise members as well as associated members from both maritime and inland navigation countries, representing about 19 Member States. In addition, the Associations member of the Waterborne Technology Platform represent the broader waterborne sector throughout the entire EU.

Enquiries concerning how to join and become more closely involved in the “Zero-Emission Waterborne Transport” partnership or other activities of the Waterborne TP can be sent to: Jaap Gebraad, Secretary General Waterborne TP, jaap.gebraad@waterborne.eu, tel: +32 493 835 626