EU Innovation Fund supports the piloting of waterborne technologies

The Waterborne Technology Platform welcomes the results of the EU Innovation Fund 2025 Net-Zero Technologies Call, providing opportunities to further upscale and deploy European innovations. However, achieving the sector's decarbonisation and competitiveness targets will require a systemic approach across the entire waterborne ecosystem.

Brussels, 02 November 2026

On 19 October, the European Commission published the results of the EU Innovation Fund 2025 Net-Zero Technologies Call. 77 proposals have been selected to receive EUR 3.4 billion in grants across 23 EEA countries. The projects span a wide range of Net-Zero technologies and will collectively cut 290 million tonnes of CO_2 emissions in their first decade of operation. Among the selected projects, five will install innovative technologies on board ships, one will deploy offshore charging infrastructure, and two will supply sustainable alternative fuels for the waterborne transport sector.

Given the waterborne sector's contribution to overall EU ETS revenues, Waterborne TP calls for increased EU funding support to accelerate maritime decarbonisation.

The European waterborne sector is a technology leader, holding a globally leading position in high-technology shipbuilding, as well as in green and smart port and shipping technologies. The European commercial fleet is among the largest in the world, representing 35% of the global shipping fleet. European companies supply almost half of the world's maritime equipment and over 70% of the world's large marine engines. Furthermore, the European waterborne sector includes approximately 13,000 inland navigation vessels, which are essential for intra-EU trade. European ports are also gateways for trade, logistics, energy and military mobility, serving as strategic hubs for the energy transition, modal shift, and decarbonisation of the waterborne sector.

This diversity is also reflected in the sector's technological and operational requirements. The sector encompasses a wide range of vessel types and services, differentiated by power requirements, operational profiles and autonomy. These include inland waterway transport vessels, ferries, short sea ships, cruise ships, ocean-going and offshore vessels. Further distinctions exist between liner and bulk/tramp shipping and their respective business models, as well as between retrofitting existing vessels and building new ones. Funding instruments must take these differences into account to ensure that innovation can be supported across all segments of shipping.

Given the long lifetimes of waterborne assets, radically new solutions must be deployed as early as possible. Accelerating research, development and innovation, as well as supporting upscaling and deployment across all shipping segments, is therefore critical to boosting the competitiveness, resilience and sustainability of the European waterborne sector. This aligns directly with the key priorities identified in the Draghi report on the future of European Competitiveness: closing the innovation gap, decarbonising the waterborne sector, and reducing strategic dependencies. Furthermore, this approach supports the implementation of the European Industrial Maritime Strategy and the EU Ports Strategy.

Jaap Gebraad, Secretary General of Waterborne TP, added: "*We welcome the projects selected under the EU Innovation Fund, particularly those supporting the piloting of technologies on board of ships. The upcoming dedicated maritime call in the context of the EU Innovation Fund, scheduled for December, is another encouraging step towards accelerating innovation in the waterborne sector. However, to achieve the decarbonisation objectives while strengthening the competitiveness of the sector, funding criteria*

must reflect the diversity of the European waterborne sector and ensure that all vessel types and services can access and benefit, with a particular focus on SMEs, which form the backbone of the sector.
At the same time, investing in individual vessels will not be sufficient to achieve our ambitions. Given the long lifetimes of waterborne assets, systematic deployment of innovations is essential, addressing the entire ecosystem, - from fuels to vessels and infrastructure. In this context, the proposed European Competitiveness Fund will be key to enabling investments, supporting the systematic and large-scale deployment of innovations in line with the priorities identified in the recently published Waterborne Technology Roadmaps."

WATERBORNE TP has been set up as an industry-oriented Technology Platform to establish a continuous dialogue between the European waterborne sector and the EU Institutions and Member States (www.waterborne.eu). The members of Waterborne TP represent about 19 EU Member States and four European Countries associated to Horizon Europe.

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 6