



i34BLUE GROWTH

green innovation for blue growth

Deliverable 5.2

Regional policy roundtables

11 – 2025

Version # 1

Project ID	101133055
Project title	I3-4-BLUE-GROWTH: Unlocking the potential of Sustainable Blue Economy
Deliverable title	Regional policy roundtables
Deliverable number	Deliverable D5.2
Deliverable version	1
Date of delivery	30.11.2025
Online access	
Diffusion	
Nature of deliverable	Public
Partner responsible	HAMAG-BICRO

Version	Date	Contributors	Description
1.0.	12.11.2025.	HAMAG-BICRO	First deliverables draft
1.1	30.11.2025	HAMAG-BICRO, PMBA	Draft incorporating final comments



Funded by the European Union, under **Project ID 101133055**. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the Interregional Innovation Investment Instrument. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

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1. Introduction

I3-4-BLUE-GROWTH is a capacity building and investment project preparatory action aimed at promoting interregional cooperation for innovation and investment projects in high-priority and value-added markets of the blue economy sector.



This deliverable report is on the findings of **Task 5.2 (T5.2): Regional policy dialogues of roundtables for exchange of best practices in policy and regulatory solutions to boost investment & innovation**. The output directly contributes to the WP5 Specific Objectives, particularly:

- **O5.1:** Promote interregional collaboration and investment opportunities.
- **O5.2:** Delivery peer learning, exchange and networking activities to promote opportunities, know-how, and expertise exchange.
- **O5.3:** Establish an internationalization plan for equipping regional actors and SMEs on access to global/EU value chains and markets with high potential.

2. Project Context and Deliverable Purpose

The regional policy roundtables, organised by the I3-4 Blue Growth project were held from x to z, bringing brought policy makers and stakeholders from coastal and insular regions across Europe in dialogue around key policy topics for the blue economy . With work performed earlier in the project in WP2 partners were able to identify key challenges and priorities for regulation, investment support, and S3 policies for sustainable blue economy value chains.

This document will cover the methodology pursued in program design, speaker recruitment, and promotion; then the contents of the discussions will be characterized; participation and results from satisfaction surveys will be discussed; and a conclusions will be drawn about the sessions and the paths forward they suggest for public policy promoting green innovation for blue growth.

Methodology

3. Methodology Peer-Learning Action

The methodology for T5.2 was designed **as a peer-learning action** aimed at stimulating capacity building and the transfer of best practices among the participating consortium partners and regional stakeholders. The core mechanism was the delivery of three online regional policy dialogues, or roundtables.

The task structure was as follows:

1. **Topic Definition:** Based on prior analysis from the project (T2.1 and T2.3), three critical bottlenecks—legislation, societal engagement, and funding—were selected as the core themes for the dialogues.
2. **Organisation:** The consortium committed to delivering at least three online regional policy dialogues, with selected regional partners taking responsibility for the organisation and content of each thematic event.
3. **Stakeholder Engagement:** Each dialogue was strategically designed to gather insights from a diverse quadruple-helix group, including European institutional representatives (e.g., EC DG MARE), national ministry officials, industry experts, academic partners, and investors.

4. Topic Selection and Structure

The topics for the three roundtables were strategically defined based on prior project analysis (T2.1 and T2.3) to illustrate and address the key non-financial bottlenecks hindering investment and innovation in the two targeted blue economy value chains: marine bio-resources (aquaculture and fisheries) and renewable marine energy (decarbonization). Each roundtable was led by a specific regional partner, ensuring a tailored focus and deep engagement with the relevant innovation ecosystems. The analysis presented in the following sections is based on the comprehensive meeting minutes and presentation materials collected from these three online sessions. All roundtables took place in March 2025.

Three roundtables were organized by partners

-Hamag BICRO

-BBA

-ANI

With support and involvement from work package leader PMBA.

Progress on the task was discussed in monthly WP5 meetings. Task organization meetings were held between organizing partners and with the participation of PMBA.

Partners determined that the roundtables should be held in quick succession, allowing for a streamlined organization process, a clear and focused communication campaign, and a sequence of conversations giving our stakeholder community a dedicated stretch of time to explore and deepen engagement with these related topics.

Based on organizing partner expertise and a balance between topics relevant to the two value chains addressed by the project, partners reformulated the topics originally proposed in the grant agreement as follows:

- Policy and stakeholder engagement tools to increase societal awareness and acceptance of blue technologies (value chain #2).
- Simplify and harmonize legislation and regulations in the EU (value chain #1).
- To increase and improve funding mechanisms to support startups and SMEs developing new business models and value chains especially in the phases of proof of concept and upscaling including transnational investment (value chain #1 and #2).

5. Roundtable 1: Legislation and Harmonisation

The first roundtable, held on Tuesday, **25 March 2025**, focused on the critical need to simplify and harmonize EU legislation and regulations concerning blue economy activities, products, and technologies.

The event was moderated by Joana Moreira-Silva of BLUEBIO ALLIANCE. The panel featured Sofia Cartó (Loyal Ecosystem), Freya Robinson (SUBMARINER Network) and Gail Shuttleworth (ToBeReal / NNFCC).

5.1. Key Discussions and Takeaways

The core discussion centered on the difficulties faced by startups and companies due to the complex regulatory landscape:

1. **Challenges to Growth:** Companies often face the hurdle of "getting lost" due to different interpretations of the same EU-level regulations across member states. This lack of uniformity, particularly in sectors like aquaculture (e.g., water quality and discharge limits), impacts project implementation⁸. Furthermore, strict regulations place European products at a competitive disadvantage against foreign markets.
2. **Solutions and Models:** Norway's salmon industry was cited as a model for success, primarily due to streamlined processes. Key recommendations included establishing a **one-stop authority** for licensing and permits, introducing **green and flexible licenses** to encourage innovation, and standardizing regulations at the national level as a precursor to EU harmonization.
3. **Stakeholder Engagement:** Panellists stressed that conversation with stakeholders is essential for policy makers to address real-world problems and draft policies that are implementable.
4. **ToBeReal Support:** Gail Shuttleworth highlighted that the ToBeReal project will provide tailored support through four pillars (including Regulatory and Policy). Its planned activities include producing regulatory reference documents, holding webinars, and hosting workshops to help companies navigate complex rules.

In conclusion, harmonization is necessary but complex, requiring collaboration and early, consistent engagement between policy makers and industry stakeholders.

This dialogue explored how complex and disparate regulations create significant barriers to entry and scaling for blue economy SMEs. The core issue is the challenge for companies to **"Not Getting Lost"** in the maze of strict EU-level regulations, which are often subject to different interpretations across member states.

- **Key Findings:** Regulatory differences lead to a **competitive disadvantage**, making EU products more expensive or slower to reach the market compared to foreign competitors. The speakers emphasized that regulatory differences, while challenging, can also drive **opportunities for collaboration** and the exchange of best practices.
- **Policy Insight:** Good policy decision-makers must be keen to listen to companies operating in the field to define policies that are both strategic and **possible to implement and comply with**. Strategic guidelines and clarity are essential to guide companies through the early stages of innovation.

6. Roundtable 2: Stakeholder Engagement and Societal Acceptance

Held on Wednesday, 26 March 2025, this roundtable examined how stakeholder engagement and societal acceptance can support the uptake of blue technologies, with a focus on maritime decarbonization and renewable marine energy. Moderated by **Danijel Kanski**, the session brought together **Maja Pokrovac (OIEH)**, representatives of the Ministry of Economy, **Karine Besses (CNDP, France)**, and **Miro Hegedić (EIT Community)**.

6.1. Key Discussions and Takeaways

1. Challenges to Growth

- Public resistance stems from a lack of understanding, trust, and transparency around blue technologies.
- Project delays often result from legal disputes and administrative complexity rather than from public consultation itself.
- Weak connections between policy, business, and research hinder innovation transfer and reduce investor confidence.

2. Solutions and Models

- The French CNDP model (“La Mer en Débat”) demonstrates how early, inclusive, and transparent consultation improves project design, reduces polarization, and prevents legal disputes.
- Using multiple tools (public meetings, mobile debates, school visits, online engagement) increases legitimacy and promotes shared ownership of results.
- Croatia’s offshore wind mapping initiative was highlighted as a successful example of how transparent data sharing builds acceptance and trust.
- EIT’s Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs) provide a replicable model for bridging research, market, and policy sectors.

3. Stakeholder Engagement

- Engagement must go beyond formal compliance and become genuinely inclusive, participatory, and respectful of community concerns.
- Building public and private partnerships and transparent working groups facilitates trust, collaboration, and community ownership of solutions.
- Stakeholders should be engaged at an early stage—when they can still influence both the “why” and “how” of a project—not merely informed after decisions have been made.

Conclusion

Societal acceptance is not a barrier but a critical enabling for effective deployment, investment attraction, and policy alignment in blue technologies. Authentic engagement leads to

improved project quality, reduced conflict, stronger investor confidence, and accelerated implementation.

Key Findings

- Consultation, when genuine, saves time, improves projects, and minimizes legal and social risks.
- Public engagement must be transparent, inclusive, and respectful, ensuring communities are active contributors—rather than passive audiences.
- Societal acceptance, policy clarity, and investor confidence are interconnected and must be addressed together.

Policy Insight

Policymakers should embed structured public engagement into the regulatory process, allowing early, authentic participation and integrating stakeholder input into project design. Creating cross-sectoral platforms that connect policymakers, innovators, investors, and communities is essential for unlocking investment, reducing resistance, and scaling blue economy solutions.

7. Roundtable 3: Funding Mechanisms and Investment

The final roundtable, held on Thursday, 27 March 2025, explored policy and financial mechanisms to mobilize investment, bridge funding gaps, and scale blue economy innovations.

The session was moderated by **Vagner Morais (BGT Consulting Group)**, featuring **Claus Schultze (EC DG MARE)**, **João Rito (SEAentia)**, **Manuel Nina (Goparity)**, **Marisa Lameiras da Silva (DG for Maritime Policy)**, and **Zsolt Gemesi (International Business School)**.

7.1. Key Discussions, Takeaways and Work Completed

1. Challenges to Growth

- **Funding Gaps in TRL 6–8:** The most critical challenge is the lack of financing for mid-to-late Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs) (pilot to pre-commercial stages), where seed funding ends and venture capital is not yet available.
- **Regulatory and Infrastructure Lag:** Funding mechanisms and regulatory frameworks are not evolving fast enough to support emerging blue technologies.
- **Investor Readiness:** Startups often lack practical investment readiness, scalable business models, or international market focus—limiting their ability to attract funding.

2. Solutions and Models

- **Smart Specialization and EU Platforms:** The Smart Specialization framework and EU Blue Economy mechanisms (e.g., BlueInvest) were emphasized as strong drivers for innovation and cross-border investment.
- **Crowdfunding and Alternative Finance:** Crowdfunding platforms, such as those provided by Goparity, help close the funding gap by providing social proof, early adopters, and traction.
- **The Blue Fund (Portugal):** Presented as a concrete example of a national program that mobilizes private capital specifically for blue economy investments.
- **Industrial First Client Strategy:** SEAentia demonstrated how acting as the first industrial client helps commercial validation and accelerates TRL progression.

3. Stakeholder Engagement

- Collaboration between investors, SMEs, policymakers, and commercialization experts was repeatedly highlighted as essential for unlocking finance.
- Startups must engage early with decision-makers to voice challenges, identify regulatory bottlenecks, and position their innovations in international markets.
- Building investor trust requires visibility, networking, and showcasing viable business cases rather than purely technological prototypes.

Conclusion

Funding is available, but access depends on coordination, investment readiness, and strategic alignment between innovators, investors, and public authorities. Collaborative engagement between all stakeholders is essential to mobilize capital and scale blue economy solutions.

Key Findings

- The largest funding gap lies in mid-to-late TRL stages, where ideas must transition from prototypes to market-ready solutions.
- Financial instruments and investor platforms (e.g., BlueInvest) are more scalable and impactful than grants alone.
- Alternative financing models such as crowdfunding and national Blue Funds help reduce risk, create social proof, and attract private capital.

Policy Insight

Policymakers should co-design innovation funding pathways with industry and investors, ensuring support mechanisms cover all TRL stages—not just early research or late commercialization. National and EU-level platforms must integrate investment readiness training, regulatory alignment, and cross-border financing collaboration to unlock growth in the blue economy.

8. Results

The roundtables were highly effective in delivering the **Peer-Learning & Capacity-Building** objectives of WP5 by achieving the following:

- **Deepening Understanding and Transferring Know-How:** The structured dialogues facilitated a direct exchange between regions and EU bodies, effectively **transferring knowledge and good practices** (e.g., authentic consultation, BlueInvest methodology) to less-developed regions. This directly supports **O5.2**.
- **Identifying Investment Pipelines:** By explicitly identifying the three key barriers (regulatory friction, engagement challenges, and the TRL funding gap), the roundtables provided the necessary **diagnostic framework** for future work on **identifying pipelines of promising interregional investments**—a core step toward achieving the overall project goals.
- **Enhancing Regional Capacity:** The sessions showcased concrete, successful models, equipping regional development authorities and SMEs with the **know-how to build stronger investment cases** and better respond to funding calls, thereby achieving the goal of making regions "**better equipped**".

8.1. Presentation of KPIs

Roundtable	No of registered	No of participants	No of viewings	Countries Representing
Roundtable 1: Legislation and Harmonisation	37	26	17	Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, Belgium, Croatia, Hungary, Germany and Malta
Roundtable 2: Stakeholder Engagement and Societal Acceptance	42	30	18	Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, Belgium, Croatia, Hungary, Germany, Scotland, Poland and Morocco
Roundtable 3: Funding Mechanisms and Investment	43	25	15	Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, Belgium, Croatia, Hungary, Germany, UK and Morocco

When participants and viewers are summed together, the KPI of 100 participants for the roundtable sessions is exceeded, the reach of the discussions meeting the targets set out at the beginning of the project

9. Conclusion and Future Directions

Takeaways on Policy Best Practices

The most important lessons learned across all three policy dialogues highlight the need for a collaborative and pragmatic approach to blue economy governance:

- **Authentic and Early Engagement:** Consultation must be genuine (not a formality) and must begin early in the project lifecycle. Policy-makers should proactively engage with stakeholders to improve project design and pre-empt polarization.
- **Policy Aligned with Operations:** Strategic plans must be grounded. Policy decision-makers must listen to companies operating in the field to ensure that new regulations are not only strategic but also possible to implement and comply with, avoiding unnecessary friction.
- **Partnerships and Alliances** are Foundational: Collaboration, collaboration, collaboration—Partnerships and industry alliances are key to breaking down regulatory and financial barriers, ensuring all stakeholders are involved with decision-makers to voice their issues and identify real bottlenecks.

Potential Policy Directions conclusions by Roundtable Results

Based on the synthesis of bottlenecks and best practices, the following policy directions are recommended for future regional and EU action:

1. **Bridge the TRL Funding Gap:** Implement new, dedicated financial instruments (beyond traditional grants) or public-private funding mechanisms specifically designed to support projects at the intermediate TRL (6-8) stage, which is essential for scaling innovation.
2. **Regulatory Streamlining at the National Level:** While EU-level harmonisation is a long-term goal, a practical first step is to focus on streamlining licensing documents and permits at the national/regional level. This creates essential clarity and transparency for companies navigating the early market phases.
3. **Invest in Physical Infrastructure:** Commit resources to developing necessary infrastructure, including the creation of pre-approved marine spaces for ocean-based blue technology testing and development to accelerate deployment.
4. **Incentivize Green Innovation:** Develop clear legislative frameworks and incentives to support innovative solutions, such as establishing laws and financial schemes that directly boost the development and uptake of cleaner technologies (e.g., hydrogen/H₂ in shipping) to drive maritime decarbonization.
5. **Connection Between Deliverable 2.2, Deliverable 5.2 and WP2 (Decarbonization and Maritime Renewable Energy)**

Deliverable 2.2 provides the analytical foundation for WP2 by mapping innovation ecosystems, RIS3 priorities, key stakeholders, and identifying two strategic value chains with high potential for sustainable blue growth—**Renewable Marine Energy & Maritime Decarbonization** and **Sustainable Aquaculture & Valorization of Blue Resources**. These value chains show strong potential for scalability and climate impact, but face critical barriers related to **regulatory fragmentation, limited public acceptance, and funding gaps (especially at TRL 6–8)**.

Deliverable 5.2 builds on these findings by translating them into **targeted policy and stakeholder actions** through three regional policy roundtables, each addressing one of the main bottlenecks identified in WP2:

Roundtable 1 addressed legislation and harmonization, highlighting solutions such as one-stop licensing and standardized permitting for marine renewables.

Roundtable 2 focused on societal acceptance, public trust, and stakeholder engagement—critical for offshore energy, hydrogen, and decarbonization projects.

Roundtable 3 targeted funding mechanisms and investment gaps, showcasing models such as Blue Invest, crowdfunding, and public-private financing to support mid-TRL decarbonization technologies. In summary, **Deliverable 2.2 identifies the “what” — the value chains, stakeholders, and systemic bottlenecks—while Deliverable 5.2 provides the “how” — practical policy, financing, and governance models to overcome them**. Together, they support WP2 by transforming analytical insights into actionable policy and investment measures, enabling decarbonization and maritime renewable energy technologies to become **investable, scalable, and socially accepted** within regional ecosystems.