



Evaluation guideline for the Expert Panel

Guideline for members of the Scientific Expert Panel of the COFASP-MARINE Biotechnology- Joint Transnational Call (JTC) 2016
(3rd Joint Transnational Call of the ERA-Net COFASP in collaboration with the ERA-net MarineBiotech) in the sectors **Aquaculture, Fishery and Seafood Processing**

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COFASP-MARINE Biotechnology- Joint Transnational Call (JTC) 2016
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1 GENERAL INFORMATION

This guideline provides information regarding the evaluation process within the framework of the common joint call launched by the COFASP-Marine Biotechnology ERA-NET

LIST OF TOPICS

- Topic 1: Fisheries stock assessment and dynamic modelling using ‘omic’ methodologies and tools
- Topic 2: Genome based approach to genetic improvement of aquaculture species
- Topic 3: Explore opportunities for the use of biotechnological tools, including targeted enzymes to develop more efficient seafood processing methods and high value products

DESCRIPTION OF TOPICS

TOPIC 1: FISHERIES STOCK ASSESSMENT AND DYNAMIC MODELLING USING ‘OMIC’ METHODOLOGIES AND TOOLS

SECTOR: FISHERIES

Challenges: A benchmark for secure and sustainable use of aquatic living resources is a strong methodology for identifying fish stocks. Such methodology supports ecological observations, monitoring and prediction, which are essential elements for fisheries policy- and decision making at governance and industry level. Development of an advanced biotechnology toolbox can play a strong role for such ecosystem approach to achieve rational harvest of fish stocks and should preferably also serve as an authentication tool throughout the seafood value chain.

Scope: Development of new, high resolution and cost effective tools for genetic identification of stock (sub-) structure and associated geographical origin identification of fish of commercially important species. The tools developed should be based upon cutting edge ‘omic’ methodology, together with other approaches, and provide an opportunity for real-time assessment. Projects should deal with one or several of the following:

- Operational tools for fisheries management, control and enforcement and incorporation of information in regional stock assessment, spatially-explicit stock structure modelling and habitat use and functionality models.
- Tools that provide sufficient statistical power to make forensic inferences in relation to IUU¹ fisheries and/or for sea food integrity (species authentication).

Impact: More efficient and reliable use of fish resources at governance and industry level and robust tools to demonstrate seafood industry probity.

¹ IUU stands for Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated fishing

TOPIC 2: GENOME BASED APPROACH TO GENETIC IMPROVEMENT OF AQUACULTURE SPECIES*SECTOR: AQUACULTURE*

Challenges: There is a high demand to increase EU aquaculture competitiveness and sustainability on global scale. A key factor in this respect is genetic improvement of farmed organisms and in particular through advanced selective breeding to reduce production cost and minimise production vulnerabilities and risk. A driver to meet this goal is further development of efficient biotechnological/genomic tools and methods to be used in genetic improvement programmes. Such tools and methods can help select for traits such as growth rate, feed efficiency robustness and resistance to environmental stressors and pathogens. Another important factor is the possibility to use sterile fish. Sterile farmed fish can both reduce genetic impact on wild fish and avoid early sexual maturation, which is often correlated with negative aspects such as reduced growth and product quality.

Scope:

1. Development of biotechnological tools and methods to understand and improve important traits for genetic improvement primarily through selective breeding. Such traits could be related to, but not restricted to; health and feed utilisation.
 - **health**
Improved robustness, increased resistance to diseases.
 - **feed**
Efficient feed conversion and biochemical processing of feed ingredients, including processing of feeds based on new raw materials
2. Development and application of biotechnological tools to develop efficient methods in production of sterile fish.

Impact: Application of more advanced tools and methods to be used for genetic improvement particularly advanced selective breeding that will increase economic success of European aquaculture.

TOPIC 3: EXPLORE OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE USE OF BIOTECHNOLOGICAL TOOLS, INCLUDING TARGETED ENZYMES TO DEVELOP MORE EFFICIENT SEAFOOD PROCESSING METHODS AND HIGH VALUE PRODUCTS*SECTOR: SEAFOOD PROCESSING***Challenges:**

Industrial processing of marine biomass has an unrealized and large potential to increase the economic value by the development of more efficient processing methods and a better utilization of the different valuable fractions (proteins, fat, carbohydrates, minerals, pigments, polysaccharides, etc.). By new developments and application of biotechnological methods and knowledge, this potential can be realized.

Scope: With an aim to utilize material along the value chain, seafood processing and by products from marine activities like aquaculture, harvesting and fisheries should be targeted. More efficient processing methods can be developed by applying enzymes for more cost-effective and environmentally friendly processing solutions, enhanced processing conditions to give higher quality products or create innovative new processes for valorisation of seafood. Further, an aim is to utilise as much as possible of the biomass when processing seafood such that high value products can be produced from fractions today considered as by-products.

Impact: Boost marine production innovation through biotechnology

For information on the call text, the call announcement should be consulted. Further details on the structure of a full proposal are available in the Guideline for applicants. Both documents can be found at <http://www.cofasp.eu/>.

2 TIMELINE

Only the proposals which have successfully passed the eligibility check by the Call Secretariat and the Call Board (funders) are sent to the Scientific Evaluation Panel to assess their scientific excellence.

The planned schedule and activities relevant for the experts are listed in the table below:

Action	Scheduled
Deadline for full proposals' submission	By 20 June
COFASP eligibility check by the Call Secretariat	By 30 June
National eligibility check by the partner countries	By 4 July
Experts sign confidentiality and no-conflict of interest declaration	By 4 July
1 st SEP meeting (Check conflict of interest, Selection of chair and co-chair, Suggestions of external reviewers if needed)	By 7 July
Online tool opened for evaluation by the experts	By 10 July
Online evaluation by the experts	By 01 Sep
Rapporteurs write the draft evaluation report	By 10 Sep
SEP members will receive the draft evaluation reports	By 11 Sep
2 nd SEP meeting (ranking of proposals, consensus reports)	15 September

The Expert Panel meeting is planned to last max. 2 days and will take place in September 2016 (according to the expert availability) in Bucharest, Romania.

3 ORGANISATION OF THE SCIENTIFIC EVALUATION PANEL (SEP)

For each of the three topics (Fisheries, Aquaculture and Sea Food processing), a Scientific Evaluation Panel (SEP), consisting of at least three experts per topic, is set up. The role of SEP is to evaluate the submitted proposals and to elaborate a ranking list for each topic of these proposals.

Each SEP is composed of high-level experts from different fields within the topic, representing both academic and industry-related research and geographically and gender balanced as much as possible. The number of SEP members from each of the countries participating in the call should be balanced, and a sufficient number of the SEP members should be drawn from non-participating countries. All experts are required to sign a declaration of “confidentiality and no-conflict of interest” in the online tool before they can start the content evaluation (see section 6- Confidentiality and Conflict of interest). Applicants cannot be members of SEP.

The CB decides on the composition of the SEP with the support from the JCS. Each CB member can nominate one member for the SEP and suggest further experts. The JCS collects nominations and suggestions, and organises a vote of the CB to rank the pooled list of suggested experts. The JCS then contacts these experts in the ranking order to request their participation, while taking into account the above-mentioned balance criteria and consulting the CB for any change of ranking order needed to avoid unbalance. The final composition of the SEP is submitted to the CB for approval.

SEP members select the SEP chair and vice chair. CB and SEP should be currently working outside of the countries participating in the call. If needed, a separate vote is organised to support this selection.

The members of the SEP do not act in the interest of the CB member organisations nor adopt national considerations. They evaluate and propose a final ranking of the proposals only on the basis of the approved evaluation criteria.

Scientists involved in a proposal submitted to the JTC cannot be SEP members.

The tasks of the chair are:

- To have an overview of all the eligible proposals
- To define a working procedure with the Call secretariat for the Expert Panel meeting (i.e. debates of the proposals following alphabetical order or online evaluation score of proposals, etc.)
- To chair their part of meeting
- To validate the ranking list determined by the Scientific Evaluation Panel and the evaluation reports

The Call Secretariat will provide administrative support to the experts during the evaluation process.

4 EVALUATION PROCESS

Each proposal shall be evaluated by at least three experts.

The experts are asked to evaluate the assigned full proposals in a two-step procedure: 1) online evaluation and 2) debates during the Expert Panel meeting.

4.1. EVALUATION CRITERIA

The experts will score and rank the proposals based on the following five criteria:

Criterion 1- Relevance of the proposal

- The proposal addresses the aim(s) of the joint transnational call as described in the topic descriptions.
- Relevance of the proposal compared to the call text and current state of knowledge (Innovative and problem solving potential of the project and complementarity with already existing results).
- Transnational and/or European added value.

Criterion 2- Scientific and technical quality of the proposal

- Scientific excellence in terms of progress of knowledge with respect to the state of the art, conceptual breakthrough including methodology.
- Innovation level of the project and methods, and multi- and interdisciplinarity of the approach.
- Integration of the different disciplinary fields.
- Inclusion of relevant societal and ethical aspects.

Criterion 3- Impact

- Impact (Scientific impact, specific barriers and development potentials in the mentioned sectors to be overcome/supported by the project.)
- Dissemination activities and expected impact for end users:
 - strategy for technology transfer and for exploiting the potential of the project results, if relevant; industrial or technological application prospects and economic and commercial potential, business plan, integration in the industrial activity. Credibility of the described technology transfer and the method for exploiting the results.
 - potential for utilisation or integration of the project results by the scientific or industrial community or society, and impact of the project in terms of knowledge acquisition.
 - openness to stakeholders
- Expected impacts in terms of capacity building
 - Mobility/training actions
 - Education initiatives/courses on new identified skills/to fill an educational gap

- Specific initiatives (e.g. on-field training) linking human capacities and research infrastructures
- Actions supporting jobs, including non-academic, in concerned sectors

Criterion 4- Quality of the consortium

- Quality and international competitiveness of participants in the field(s) of the proposal (previous work in the field, expertise of the participants).
- Quality and efficiency of the project management (coordination of work packages and tasks management).
- Quality of the consortium and collaboration (well-balanced partnership; integrated partnership in work packages; broadness of consortium compared with geographical relevance; previous level of collaborative interaction between the participants,).

Criterion 5- Project feasibility

- Feasibility of the project – human, technical and financial resources: adequate work package structure and work plan (tasks, milestones, deliverables, matching events, calendar); adequate equipment and manpower resources; quality of the coordination plan.
- Cost-efficiency of the project plan compared with the budget. Appropriateness and justification of the requested funding (justification of the permanent personnel resources, appropriateness of the coordination costs, justification of the temporary personnel resources (trainees, PhD students, post-doctoral researchers), evaluation of the sum for investments and equipment purchases, evaluation of the other financial items (travel, subcontracting, consumables, etc.).
- Probability of success of the project based on description of risks and the contingency plan.

4.2. SCORES

The experts have to give 0-5 points for each of the five evaluation criteria. The interpretation of the numeric scores is the following:

0 - Fail. The proposal fails to address the criterion under examination or cannot be judged due to missing or incomplete information

1 - Poor. The criterion is addressed in an inadequate manner, or there are serious inherent weaknesses.

2 - Fair. While the proposal broadly addresses the criterion, there are significant weaknesses.

3 - Good. The proposal addresses the criterion well, although improvements would be necessary.

4 - Very good. The proposal addresses the criterion very well, although certain improvements are still possible.

5 - Excellent. The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion in question. Any shortcomings are minor.

4.3. ETHICAL ISSUES

Any proposal contravening fundamental ethical principles, shall not be selected, and may be excluded from the evaluation and selection procedure. The experts shall check the proposals against the European Commission's guidelines for H2020 Work Programme and report if ethical issues need to be considered. These guidelines for H2020 Work Programme are available following this link:

http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/desktop/en/funding/reference_docs.html#h2020-0-grants-manual-hi-ethics.

4.4. ONLINE EVALUATION

The experts will score and rank the proposals based on the five criteria on the online evaluation tool.

Result of the scientific online evaluation is min. 3 evaluations for each proposal, including:

- Scores for the five evaluation criteria indicated above
- Comments to each score (min. 50 words per criterion)
- An overall evaluation of scientific merit (min. 100 words)
- A funding recommendation (y/n)

To be recommended for funding, each score given for an evaluation criterion must be equal or above the threshold of 3,0 and any ethical issues must have been solved. Neither national interests nor principles of geographical return shall influence the expert evaluation process.

A guideline for the online tool will be sent out separately.

For each proposal one expert will be appointed rapporteur (main reviewer). After the evaluation deadline the rapporteurs will, for each proposal, summarize the results of the scientific evaluations in a draft evaluation report. This draft evaluation report may later be amended during the Scientific Evaluation Panel meeting. After the meeting and the debates on the proposal, it will become the final evaluation report.

Before the panel meeting, all SEP members will receive all draft evaluation reports except when they have a conflict of interest with a proposal.

4.5. SCIENTIFIC EVALUATION PANEL MEETING

It is strongly recommended that all SEP members attend the SEP meeting, but they are not expected to have read all proposals or have detailed knowledge about all areas.

The meeting will start by taking one topic at a time:

- Each proposal will be introduced and commented by the rapporteur. If the experts have different opinions, they can express them, but still, the three experts must come to an overall final judgement.

- The SEP will agree on an overall score (mean of the scores for the three evaluation criteria, one decimal after the comma) and the evaluation report.
- Second the proposals will be ranked in one list for each topic. An open discussion among all experts will ensure that the ranking lists reflect true differences in quality and impact among proposals. Scores may be modified in this process with due justification and in case of unanimous decision. Consistency in evaluation across proposals should be checked and secured. Proposals receiving an equal score will be grouped and prioritised according to their relevance to practice.

The outcome of the SEP meeting will be:

- a) One ranking list per topic of the proposals recommended for funding.
- b) If applicable, any specific new conditions that would need to be met by a consortium in order to receive funding.
- c) An evaluation report text for each proposal that may be used in a rejection letter to the applicant (200 words), validated by the chair.

The funding bodies will, in a later meeting, base their selection of proposals on the rank and available funding.

All applicants will be notified about the evaluation result of their proposal (approved or rejected). The evaluation report of the proposal will be added to the notification letter to the applicant. The applicants cannot appeal on the decision after notification by the Call Secretariat.

5 CONDITION OF THE EXPERTS' WORK

Each expert will receive a fee for his/her participation in the evaluation process that is fixed to a standard rate of €150. This rate is net of any taxes. Travel cost, accommodation and meals for attending the Expert Panel meeting will be covered by the Joint Call Secretariat.

Each scientific expert is asked to be ready to evaluate at least 4 proposals, and to be the rapporteur of 1 to 3 proposals.

The identity of the experts taking part in the evaluation will be published at the end of the selection process; however, the applicants will not be able to track the experts evaluating the individual proposals.

6 CONFIDENTIALITY AND CONFLICT OF INTEREST

All experts are required to sign a declaration of “confidentiality and no-conflict of interest” in the online tool before they can start the content evaluation.

The experts will be able to view the list of applicants beforehand to check whether they have a Conflict of Interest. Access to the full proposals is only given after the expert has viewed the pre-proposal consortium composition and submitted a declaration of confidentiality and no-conflict of interest to the Call Secretariat.

6.1. CONFIDENTIALITY

The content of the proposals and any related information must be kept confidential and must be used only for the evaluation. Documents should be handled and stored with due care. Experts are not allowed to discuss or disclose to outsiders (including applicants) any information concerning proposal documents or evaluations, nor use this information to anybody's benefit or disadvantage.

Confidentiality must also be maintained after the evaluation process has been completed.

Evaluation reports are confidential documents, but the applicant will receive a report on her/his proposal from the Call Secretariat after the funding decisions have been made.

6.2. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The experts are expected to be independent, impartial and objective. Proposals can only be evaluated by experts with no conflict of interest. It is mandatory that the experts declare to the Call Secretariat any issues that could be considered as a conflict of interest. A conflict of interest may arise if the approval or rejection of the proposal may in any way benefit or harm the expert, for example in a professional, financial, or personal way. In the case that an expert becomes aware of actually having a conflict of interest after he/she signed the no-conflict declaration, the expert has to inform the Call Secretariat as soon as possible. Cases of conflict of interest and disqualifications are decided by the Call Secretariat at proposal level, i.e. an expert having a conflict regarding one proposal may still be an active panel member but cannot evaluate the proposal where he/she has a conflict. The expert will then not have access to this proposal and will have to leave the panel meeting room while the proposal is discussed.

A conflict of interest is generally regarded to be present in the following cases:

(The 'applicant' is the coordinator and/or one of the partners in the consortium.)

- Working at the same department / research group within an institution (e.g. doing research, teaching, working in an honorary position, Management or Advisory Board, tutoring Master- or PhD students)
- Has been co-worker/collaborator during the past five years
- Has been a superior, subordinate or instructor of the applicant
- Earlier wrote a letter of recommendation for the proposed project
- Would benefit from the project or contributes to the project

- Has a personal relationship (friend or relative) with one of the project partners

If the expert is in doubt, he/she should consult the Call Secretariat.