



European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF)

Sustainable Aquaculture Scheme

Guidelines for Applicants



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



Arna chomhchistiú ag
an Aontas Eorpach
Co-Funded by the
European Union


BIM
Ireland's
Seafood
Development
Agency

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Introduction

These Guidelines for Applicants for the Sustainable Aquaculture Scheme provide guidance on the application process and assessment criteria.

Applicants should also refer to the scheme page on www.bim.ie which lays out the background to the scheme, who can apply, what is funded, and the amounts granted.

Eligible Beneficiaries - Who can apply for this Scheme

The scheme is open to aquaculture producers who have a statutory consent to engage in aquaculture and any necessary consent under the Foreshore Acts, and who are in compliance with the terms and conditions of those consents.

However, applications in respect of sites located in marine Special Areas of Conservation, designated in accordance with the European Union Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) (as amended), and/or Special Protection Areas, designated in accordance with EU Birds Directive (200/147/ED), that are awaiting a determination of an aquaculture licence application/renewal made under Section 10 of Fisheries Amendment Act 1997, will not be eligible under this scheme.

Eligible and Ineligible Costs

Eligible expenditure

Under the current call, applications are invited for projects with any of the following objectives, but the applicant is also free to apply for other innovative investments that fulfil the objective.

- Productive investments for sustainable aquaculture
 - Setting up of sustainable aquaculture enterprises
 - Purchase and installation of new machinery and equipment and construction of new premises in relation increasing production in existing facilities
 - Any other investment which fulfils the objective above
- Development of product innovation
 - Diversification of aquaculture production and species cultured
 - Investment in new technologies or production systems
 - Integrated Multi-Trophic Aquaculture Systems (IMTA)
 - Any other investment which fulfils the objective above
- Investment in reduction of energy use and energy efficiency
 - Investments increasing energy efficiency and promoting the conversion of aquaculture enterprises to renewable sources of energy
- Investments reducing the negative impact or enhancing the positive effects on the environment and increasing resource efficiency such as,
 - Systems to reduce water use
- Investments in enhancing the quality of, or in adding value to, aquaculture products;
- Investments resulting in a substantial reduction in the impact of aquaculture enterprises on water usage and quality, in particular through reducing the amount of water or chemicals, antibiotics and other medicines used, or through improving the output water quality,

- Promotion of closed aquaculture systems where aquaculture products are farmed in closed recirculation systems, thereby minimising water use;
- Investments in safety equipment.
 - Modernisation of aquaculture units, including the improvement in working and safety conditions of aquaculture workers
- Investment in animal health and welfare
 - Including the purchase of equipment aimed at protecting the farms from wild predators
- Food quality and hygiene safety
- General non-statutory costs, such as architects' and engineers' fees, and construction insurance costs, up to a ceiling of 10% of the cost of the construction element of the project.

Ineligible Expenditure

Any expenditure incurred before the date of acknowledgement of receipt of the grant application is ineligible.

The following operations or expenditure are not eligible for support per the EMFAF Regulation:

- Expenditure for the purchase of land;
- Value added tax except, where it is non-recoverable by the beneficiary under law.
- Interest on debt, except in the form of an interest rate subsidy or guarantee fee subsidy.
- Goods purchased under Hire Purchase or Lease Purchase agreements;
- Second hand buildings, plant, machinery, equipment, etc. and any associated installation costs;
- Intangible costs, such as cost of pre-financing and of arranging loans and interest, administrative costs, patents, invitations to tender etc.;
- Repairs and maintenance work;
- Landscaping and other embellishment works, except those specifically required as a condition of planning and recreational equipment costs.
- Vehicles for passenger transport;
- Vehicles required for market distribution;
- Material which is normally written off within a year, including consumables (items deployed in the normal course of business operations that has a limited useful life, such as rubbers, hooks, wellingtons);
- Like-for-like replacement of equipment;
- Office equipment, including desktop computers, laptops and tablets;
- Consultancy costs not directly related to the planning, preparation and execution of the project, including costs of management consultancy;

The list of ineligible items may be added to in later calls.

The current list of items which are eligible and ineligible under the scheme is available on the scheme page on www.bim.ie.

Amounts Grant Aided

Beneficiary Type	Aid Intensity Rate	Expenditure Type
All eligible beneficiaries	50%	All

For this call there is a cap of €500,000 grant aid.

Submission Deadline

This call for applications will be open from **22nd of July 2026 to 11th of September 2026**. Eligibility checks and evaluation will be carried out as applications are received but offers will not be made until after the call closes and all applications have been assessed. Should there be any budget limitations, offers will be made to the highest-ranking applications.

BIM reserves the right to close applications which have not passed all eligibility checks (including the aquaculture licence good standing check) by 23rd October 2026 may be closed. If the applicant can address the reasons that they failed eligibility checks in advance of the next call under the scheme, they will be free to apply again under the next call.

Applicants are free to incur expenditure for their project from the point that they submit an application, **but this is entirely at the applicant's risk**. As noted above, an application may be closed, or an offer of grant aid might not be made.

Claim Deadline

All projects must be completed with a claim submitted by **29th October 2027**.

Application and Approval Process

This flow shows the steps involved in getting from application preparation to receiving a Letter of Offer.

Applications with a value **over the cut-off threshold** of €50,000 expenditure / €25,000 grant aid follow the process below.

Note that the cut-off threshold of €50,000 expenditure / €25,000 grant aid applies per applicant over the lifetime of the scheme i.e. as soon as the cumulative value of applications from an applicant exceeds the cut-off threshold all subsequent applications will follow the above threshold process.



- The applicant prepares their application in BIM's grants management system.
- When the application is submitted, an acknowledgement email is automatically sent. This is the date of acknowledgement (any expenditure incurred before this date will not be eligible for funding).
- BIM carries out a series of eligibility checks, to ensure that all required information has been provided and shows compliance with scheme rules. An email is sent to the applicant to confirm when all eligibility checks have passed.
- A financial, environmental and technical review is then carried out, and a BIM panel meets to score the application.
- Once all applications have been received i.e. after the closure date, all eligible applications which meet the minimum score are presented to a Project Approvals Board. Applications are appraised having regard to the objectives of the scheme and the quality of the proposal.
- If the Project Approvals Board approves the application for funding, a Letter of Offer will be issued.

Applications with a value **below the cut-off threshold** of €50,000 expenditure / €25,000 grant aid follow the process below.



- The applicant prepares their application in BIM's grants management system.
- When the application is submitted, an acknowledgement email is automatically sent. This is the date of acknowledgement (any expenditure incurred before this date will not be eligible for funding).
- BIM carries out a series of eligibility checks, to ensure that all required information has been provided and shows compliance with scheme rules. An email is sent to the applicant to confirm when all eligibility checks have passed.
- An environmental and technical review is then carried out, and a BIM panel meets to score the application.
 - If they determine it is necessary to have the application reviewed by the PAB, the application will be included in the next scheduled PAB meeting.
- Once all applications have been received i.e. after the closure date, the BIM panel will meet again to approve
- If the BIM Approvals Board approves the application for funding, a Letter of Offer will be issued.

When you will hear from us

1. When you submit your application, you will receive an automated email acknowledging receipt. If you do not receive this email, it is because the application has not been successfully submitted. Please check your spam folder in case the acknowledgement of receipt has been directed there. *Please note that an acknowledgement of receipt email is not a confirmation of grant aid. At this point the application is being processed only.* Your application will be assigned a unique reference number, and you will be notified of this in the acknowledgement email. The unique reference number should be used in any subsequent correspondence or enquiry with BIM.

Any expenditure incurred *after* the date of this email but before a Letter of Offer would be considered eligible in any claim, but such expenditure is entirely at the

applicant's risk since an offer of grant aid may not be made.

2. All applicants will hear from us at the end of the eligibility checking stage, but some applicants may have their form returned if it is incorrect/incomplete:
 - i. You will hear from us if there is an issue with your application. It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure a full and complete application is submitted. If, during eligibility checking, it is discovered that information is missing, or is incorrect, your application may, if time allows, be returned to you describing the issue(s). If a grant application form is returned to an applicant for correction(s) to be made to it, applicants will be given no more than **three (3) weeks** to make the corrections and resubmit their grant application. If it is still incorrect or incomplete on resubmission it will be deemed ineligible.
 - ii. Once eligibility checks are completed all applicants will be updated as follows:
 - i. If our checks show that the application is not eligible for the scheme, or if we could not validate your eligibility based on the information provided, your application will be rejected, and the reason provided.
 - ii. If our checks show that the application is eligible for the scheme, an update will be provided to inform you of this.
3. Following evaluation, BIM will inform you of the decision.
 - a. The highest ranked projects which have been approved for funding will receive a Letter of Offer, until the budget allocation for this call has been utilised.
 - b. Those applications which have not been approved for funding will be notified, explaining the reason for not approving the project for funding.

The more complete your application is when first submitted, the more likely it is to proceed smoothly through all stages with minimum delays. We encourage all applicants to take the time to fully understand the application form, and the evaluation criteria so that they submit a quality application.

Things to note before starting your application

General guidance

- Applicants are advised to check that their application includes all the relevant information, as it will be evaluated based on the submitted content.
- The primary communication method used in the administration of this scheme is email. It is the responsibility of the Applicant to ensure that BIM is on their safe list of contacts, and that they regularly check their email for any updates or deadline requirements.
- All applications must be made in euro.

Documentation checklist

You will need the following documentation to complete this form:

- Aquaculture Licence / Operator Order
 - Note: for operators in order areas a letter of compliance with the order will be required from the relevant authority.
- Supplier quotes
- If your application relates to the construction or modernisation of an aquaculture workboat, the Load Line Certificate or Load Line Survey Application
- If your application requires planning permission or any other form of regulatory compliance or consent, evidence of same
- If your project is located in or adjacent to a Natura 2000 area, an Appropriate Assessment is required
- If your application is for expenditure of €50,000 or more:
 - Statutory declaration which includes latest financial statements (provide template)
 - Financial projections (provide template)
 - Cashflow forecasts (provide template)
 - Evidence of matched funding clearly indicating how you plan to finance this project
- If your application is for expenditure of €5,000,000 or more:
 - A cost benefit analysis of the proposal
 - Evidence of the need for State investment
 - The direct benefits to the Irish economy arising from the direct economic expenditure such as employment or impact on local suppliers.

Eligibility Checks

BIM will check the evidence provided by the applicant to ensure that all eligibility criteria set out are met, and that all required documentation has been provided.

Evaluation Scoring Criteria

Each application which passes eligibility is scored against the following evaluation criteria. It is recommended you take the time to understand this so that you can provide sufficient details in your answers which will allow you to score highly.

Above threshold i.e. projects costing €50,000 or more

Scoring guidance	If....	...then score in the range:
Direct impact against scheme objective	The applicant has demonstrated that this investment will have a significant impact against the scheme objectives they are targeting and (where relevant) a significant reduction in energy consumption or CO2 output	30-40
	The applicant has demonstrated that this investment will have an incremental impact against the scheme objectives they are targeting and (where relevant) an incremental reduction in energy consumption or CO2 output	15-29
	The applicant has demonstrated that this investment will have a limited or weak impact against the scheme objective(s) they are targeting and (where relevant) limited or no reduction in energy consumption or CO2 output	0-14
Organisation governance and capacity	The applicant has provided a clear and convincing business plan and project plan, and has clearly shown they have the capacity to deliver on those plans.	15-20
	The applicant has provided a moderately convincing business plan and project plan, and has shown they have the capacity to deliver on those plans, but some detail is lacking.	10-14
	The business plan and project plan provided by the applicant has failed to demonstrate a well-thought through investment, and/or to demonstrate they have the capacity to deliver on their plans.	0-9
Environmental impact	The applicant has demonstrated a significant reduction in energy consumption or CO2 output.	15-20
	The applicant has demonstrated an incremental reduction in energy consumption or CO2 output.	10-14
	The applicant has demonstrated a limited or no reduction in energy consumption or CO2 output.	0-9
Value for money	The applicant has provided strong evidence that they have sought value for money through the appropriate selection of expenditure items to fulfil the objectives, and appropriate quotations to compare prices for those items	15-20
	The applicant has provided some evidence that they have sought value for money through the appropriate selection of expenditure items to fulfil the objectives, and appropriate quotations to compare prices for those items	10-14
	The applicant has provided little evidence that they have sought value for money through the appropriate selection of expenditure items to fulfil the objectives, and appropriate quotations to compare prices for those items	0-9

Below threshold i.e. projects costing less than €50,000

Scoring guidance	If....	...then score in the range:
Direct impact against scheme objective	The applicant has demonstrated that this investment will have a significant impact against the scheme objectives they are targeting and (where relevant) a significant reduction in energy consumption or CO2 output	45-60
	The applicant has demonstrated that this investment will have an incremental impact against the scheme objectives they are targeting and (where relevant) an incremental reduction in energy consumption or CO2 output	30-44
	The applicant has demonstrated that this investment will have a limited or weak impact against the scheme objective(s) they are targeting and (where relevant) limited or no reduction in energy consumption or CO2 output	0-29
Value for money	The applicant has provided strong evidence that they have sought value for money through the appropriate selection of expenditure items to fulfil the objectives, and appropriate quotations to compare prices for those items	30-40
	The applicant has provided some evidence that they have sought value for money through the appropriate selection of expenditure items to fulfil the objectives, and appropriate quotations to compare prices for those items	15-29
	The applicant has provided little evidence that they have sought value for money through the appropriate selection of expenditure items to fulfil the objectives, and appropriate quotations to compare prices for those items	0-14

Offers/Rejections

Once the Project Approval Board has approved or rejected the application, BIM will issue a Letter of Offer or Letter of Rejection as appropriate.

Please note that, should you receive an offer, it is a pre-payment condition that the aquaculture licence is in good standing.

Click [here](#) for BIM's Grant Privacy Note

Appeals

[As per BIM's standard Appeals Policy](#)

Further Information/Clarifications

Requests for further information/clarifications should be addressed, by **email**, to the contact details below. Where appropriate, responses to requests for further information/clarifications will be made available to all interested parties via grantshelpdesk@bim.ie.

A dedicated feedback email address has been established to collect input from applicants on their experience of the grant's application process, and we would very much welcome your feedback, please contact us at grantsfeedback@bim.ie