

Milestone 2 – Establishment of the Innovation Council (IC)

Milestone 2 was successfully achieved in May 2023 with the formal establishment of the INNO2MARE Innovation Council (IC). This body was designed as a joint coordinating forum to connect the project consortium with key representatives of the Croatian, Slovenian, and Belgian innovation ecosystems, as well as external stakeholders, in line with the provisions of the Grant Agreement and the objectives set under WP1, Task 1.2.

The process began with the preparation and dissemination of a call for expressions of interest to potential Council members, led by the University of Rijeka (Croatian ecosystem), the University of Ljubljana (Slovenian ecosystem), and the University of Antwerp (Belgian ecosystem). The call clearly outlined the role, responsibilities, and expected contributions of IC members, while also presenting the overall goals of INNO2MARE. Based on these invitations and in accordance with the agreed selection criteria, each ecosystem appointed one or two internal representatives from the consortium and two external experts from their respective regional maritime innovation environments.

Following this transparent and inclusive selection process, the Council was established with a total of eleven members: four from the Croatian ecosystem, four from the Slovenian ecosystem, and three from the Belgian ecosystem. The head of the Innovation Council is Prof. D.Sc. Saša Zelenika, Vice-Rector for Strategic Projects at the University of Rijeka, Croatia. His portfolio focuses on knowledge valorisation, technology transfer, and innovation leadership, making him well placed to guide the Council's activities.

The establishment of the IC ensures a structured platform for exchanging intelligence, ideas, and initiatives that will directly contribute to the development of the joint Research & Innovation (R&I) strategy and action plan. The IC's external members have also been entrusted with an ambassadorial role, particularly in supporting citizen engagement and the recruitment of participants for WP6 "Citizens Connect" activities. These efforts will be crucial in mobilising bottom-up civic participation, strengthening innovation culture, and promoting cross-border collaboration.

To secure efficient and continuous communication, a dedicated MS Teams channel was set up, complementing the Council's commitment to meet at least once annually at dedicated forums. The IC's progress and activities will be reported regularly to the INNO2MARE consortium through the Council head's contributions at project management meetings.

With its establishment, the IC has laid the foundation for long-term strategic collaboration across ecosystems. Over the coming months, the Council will define and adopt a plan and programme of activities, which will guide its contributions throughout the project. By month 48, the IC will also produce a formal report documenting its operations, activities, and achievements, thereby completing its mandate under Task 1.2.

The successful completion of Milestone 2 marks a significant step in building mechanisms and tools for smooth cross-ecosystem coordination, ensuring that INNO2MARE delivers on its mission to strengthen sustainable and resilient innovation ecosystems in Croatia, Slovenia, and Belgium.