European Structural and Investment Funds

Scottish Rural Action

Introduction

Scottish Rural Action was formed to be a national voice for rural Scotland, bringing together different interests and stakeholders. This paper is a summary of the views expressed by stakeholders, including rural communities, regarding rural development in the context of Brexit.

It is broadly recognised that Scotland places a high value on its rural communities with a range of policies and initiatives designed to support and improve rural life. Communities are leading with great success in many rural areas, supported by opportunities for community empowerment, and addressing complex issues at a community level.

Brexit presents an opportunity for rural Scotland to be united, decisive and lead the way in rural development. Stakeholders are keen to utilise this opportunity fully and to be engaged in related discussions and decision-making processes ensuring the grass-roots are involved at all stages.

Recommendations

a. A rural strategy for Scotland is agreed, which brings together the interests of different stakeholders, agrees outcomes for rural Scotland and details the steps which are needed to achieve those outcomes.

b. Funding for rural development should be clearly linked to the agreed strategy, with funding prioritised and allocated according to the priorities within the strategy.

c. The strategy must be developed in partnership with key stakeholders and rural communities to be effective and gain widespread support. This includes the need to engage with those rural voices that are not heard as well as others, utilising the Rural Parliament and other mechanisms.

d. The strategy and Scottish Government should overtly recognise the diversity and value of all sectors of the rural economy. This means utilising evidence about the key sectors and drivers of the economy and preparing a strategy and funding streams accordingly.

e. The strategy should recognise and support the role of communities in rural development and the rural economy, including the value of community-led enterprise and enterprise support.

f. Diversification of the rural economy should be supported, and growth sectors encouraged to flourish in rural locations. This should include those that are more traditionally located in urban settings, as improved connectivity increasingly makes this a more viable option.

g. The strategy must be based on appropriate evidence, including evidence of rural economic drivers and barriers across individual sectors and more widely.

h. The strategy should be monitored and evaluated effectively, with built-in indicators of success, that are suitable for measuring progress in rural areas.

i. Rural communities and the economy need certainty and the Government should take steps to reassure communities that the wider rural community is being listened to, and
that community-led funding (similar in principles to LEADER) will be available in the future.

Evidence Sources

- Scottish Rural Action Conference & AGM, October 2017 A workshop on the future of rural Scotland post-Brexit was held in Dunfermline in October 2017 and attended by 38 rural stakeholders. Full workshop responses are available here: http://ruralaction.scot/
- Manifesto for rural Scotland The Manifesto was formed following engagement with over 2000 people in rural Scotland and detailed analysis of LEADER strategies from 14 areas. The Manifesto contains recommendations on 21 policy areas. The Manifesto is available here: https://www.scottishruralparliament.org.uk/manifesto/
- Scottish Rural Parliament 2016 The second Scottish Rural Parliament brought 350 people together to discuss issues of importance to rural communities including the Manifesto for rural Scotland. An event report is available here: https://www.scottishruralparliament.org.uk/rural-parliament-2016/