

SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT FINANCE AND CONSTITUTION COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO FUNDING OF EU COMPETENCES

Submission on Community Led Local Development---LEADER and EMFF (European Fisheries and Maritime Fund, Communities Element)

Peter Ross, voluntary, independent Chair of:

- Dumfries and Galloway Local Action Group
- Chair of Scottish CLLD (Community Led Local Development) Chair's Group

1. LEADER is a process to improve the lives of rural people through social, economic and environmental actions.

2. CLLD is delivered in Scotland through LEADER and EMFF. It is a mechanism to allocate European Structural Investment, ESI, to projects which have a positive impact on the local economy. The amount of total funds is approximately £106m. It is managed by a partnership of Scottish Government (Management Authority), Local Authorities and one TSI (Accountable Bodies) and local area-based partnerships (LAGs and FLAGs) comprising independent Chairs, Private Businesses, Public Bodies and local experienced skilled volunteers. This ensures that local needs are met through the implementation of Local Development Strategies (LDS), overseeing and awarding applications for project funding.

3. There are 21 LDSs covering rural Scotland which local people have devised and submitted to the MA prior to the programme commencing. These strategies target what is the most urgent need in their locality through research, local knowledge and consultation. It is linked to national and regional strategies. They are innovative, bottom up, integrated, and not to be risk averse.

4. Dumfries and Galloway have 3 main themes to tackle:

- **Economy** with an emphasis on young people, tourism, arts and culture, social heritage
- **Land, Coast and Marine** with an emphasis on enhancing our local assets of farming, forestry, fishing and natural environmental assets.
- **Sustainable Settlements** emphasising joined up solutions to transport, services, housing, older people and vulnerable groups.

5. We were awarded circa £7m which is now mostly allocated to projects and has attracted other funds at around £5m securing 7 full time jobs within the LEADER Team in the process.

6. To give you a flavour here are some examples from the 350 projects supported over 20 years of LEADER in Dumfries and Galloway:

- Savour the Flavours.
- Reintroduction of Golder Eagles in cooperation with Border LAG

- Day of the Region. Building community capacity by the celebration of their community in cooperation with other across the region, and partners in Finland, Poland, Ireland, Romania, Germany, Austria and The Netherlands.
- Funds towards Wigtown Book Town, 20 years ago
- Capacity for Change (communities which we knew had not received any funding, in partnership with SRUC)
- Funds towards the formation of the Crichton Campus, 20 years ago.
- Spring Fling. Arts and Craft marketing
- Sir Peter Scott Observatory. Improving visitor attractions.
- Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere in cooperation with Ayrshire LAG.
- Whithorn Trust Reconstructed Iron Age Roundhouse
- Lochmaben Community Footpath. To enhance a Community, buy-out of land.
- Isle of Whithorn Hall Redevelopment (Funding of £4k led to a £1.4m project).
- Similar projects will be replicated throughout the LEADER network in rural Scotland.

7. The LEADER Approach has, over the years, raised the capacity of rural communities to take control of the regeneration of their very local areas. LEADER produces an LDS which then allows individuals, businesses and groups of local people to do what's they think is best for them within the regulations and providing good value for public pound spend. It is difficult to measure but we are automatically applying a SROI (social return on Investment) measurement on projects this programme. During the last programme a community project attracted £8.48 for each £1 invested simply because one of the young people involved got a confidence boost, became self-employed and started a business.

8. EU funds have been a catalyst for rural development over the years. It is important for the whole rural economy to have the means to improve their circumstances in a manner which empowers them to take control over their destiny. Universal schemes don't work in the same way as urban settings. Large employers mostly don't exist in the countryside. Small Businesses don't/can't take the risk of employing people. Young people of talent move away, unless they have family business to fall back on, don't come back. The available jobs with career prospects are always looking for experience. Unless the rural area has a large city within a travel to work the possibility middle earning jobs are scarce.

9. Adopting the CLLD model of local decision making will also provide a platform on which stakeholders and partner organisations can come together and share knowledge of best practice. The country must be open to learning from others and exploring good practice from elsewhere through cooperation and partnership working.

10. From a LEADER perspective Brexit will have a devastating effect. The current LEADER programme represents the last LEADER funded programme -- a loss of around £100m for rural Scotland. This represents a significant economic challenge for rural areas – communities rely on the financial and developmental

support provided by these EU funded programmes and the need for financial support to enable our communities to thrive will not disappear. Alternative methods to support the entrepreneurial spirit of our communities will be required and the new agency is well placed to deliver an integrated approach to community and economic development - informed by what has been delivered through LEADER in order not to stifle the appetite for change our communities currently demonstrate.

11. A long-term vision for Rural Scotland required – no knee jerk reaction to Brexit – a coherent message across the country to encourage investment into our rural communities and businesses. The LEADER model has been honed over many years and has been part of a long-term strategic shift which can inform policy tackles this matter. The LEADER approach can be part of the solution, building on the legacy of LEADER success across Scotland’s rural communities.

12. The recently launched study ‘After Brexit: 10 key questions for rural policy in Scotland’ (Newcastle University and SRUC) concurs ‘how can Scotland build on the expertise and success of LEADER....?’ They go on to suggest ‘Brexit could offer an opportunity for a more territorial, place-based approach that is better targeted and tailored to need’. There is an opportunity to be creative and innovative in the approach it takes to finding solutions to the economic challenges the rural areas will face post-Brexit – a chance to transition new ways of working and enable communities to thrive beyond European funding regulation.

13. However, our own consultations and research for our LDS, chimed with other studies, particularly, by the James Hutton Institute on the socio-economics of rural Scotland show that in some remote rural areas there is a downward spiral of the structural fabric of both social and economic life which requires urgent action.

14. LEADER as a process is a proven and tried mechanism to help deliver such change.

15. The recent OECD Conference on ‘Enhancing Rural Innovation’, held in Edinburgh, in my view, reinforced what I have illustrated above by stating:

- Place well-being at the forefront of rural policy across its multiple dimensions: social, environmental and economic.
- Take a place-based view of rural development that considers the different conditions and needs of communities depending on their geographical/linkages and their local specific assets, such as a ‘natural capital’. Place should also be considered for those policies that are not inherently place-based. Taking a place-based approach implies:
- Implementing an integrated approach that maximises complementarities across policy sectors ensuring that policies enhance one another. Replacing top down prescriptive approaches by result-orientated policies with room for local experimentation to favour policy synergies.

- Designing and implementing policies with a long-term perspective and promoting coherence between rural, sectoral, regional and national policy objectives, through collaboration across levels of government and with the public and private sectors.
- Develop rural-urban linkages to improve regional performance, achieve effective public service delivery and improve quality of life for residents.
- Promote societal approaches based on social innovation with a proactive approach for local communities contributing to climate adaption and mitigation while ensuring sustainability in rural areas.
- Empower communities to better understand and address the conditions and challenges they face to support community-led efforts.
- Incorporate the effect of demographic trends in rural areas on the design of public services, the functioning of rural labour markets, and commuting and migration patterns.

16. The LEADER community would like to see the government take the long view. Reinforce a community led local development process that places decision making around social, economic and environmental issues combined with strategic policies that affect local people, and the means of implementation.

Peter Ross, 31 May 2018