

## UNITED KINGDOM

# Stakeholder involvement

### Location

Scotland

### Programming period

2014 - 2020

### Funding (EUR)

National/regional co-  
financing (3 years) £ 250 000

### Duration

2014 – 2014

### Implemented by

Scottish Rural Parliament

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### Website

[www.scottishruralparliament.org.uk](http://www.scottishruralparliament.org.uk)

The model of the Rural Parliament is one which has grown across Europe. Scotland has adopted the model, following the example of others such as Sweden, Finland and Estonia.

### The need

The Rural Parliament model has been in existence for a number of years as a means of bringing stakeholders together particularly in Sweden.



The model and the success of it over the past 20 years made stakeholders in Scotland consider whether a Rural Parliament would work in the same manner in bringing people together to discuss, engage in and take action on rural issues. Organisers of the Scottish Parliament sought to create an advisory forum, and to consider what the key themes would be ahead of the first meeting of the Scottish Parliament, so the objectives were to consult with the stakeholders to identify the themes to be discussed at the Rural Parliament, and then to be able to create and action plan for delivery.

### Main steps and features

There was an awareness of Rural Parliaments in around ten countries across Europe. Sweden was the original model, so we visited them to learn from their experience. Some new ideas were gained, but also confirmation that Scotland has its own specific situation.

For example in Sweden there are 290 municipalities for a population of 9.5 million, and locally elected municipality officials represent, on average, a couple of hundred people. In Scotland, just 32 Local Authorities represent 5.2 million; the councillor/resident ratio is more than 1:4 000.

An advisory forum was created for the Scottish Parliament, which is a group of (mainly) national organisations with a stake in rural affairs that was brought together to provide advice on preparing and implementing the Parliament.

25 local events were conducted in different rural locations across Scotland, including on islands and off the mainland. The locations and contexts were very diverse, but many of the key themes came up repeatedly.

Using these inputs, and examination of reports of previous work to identify what matters to rural communities, a short-list of priority themes for the 2014 Rural Parliament was created. Rural stakeholders were asked to vote on these both online and at a major rural event.

This process confirmed the priority themes of the Scottish Rural Parliament 2014 as:

- Rural business and employment;
- Access to broadband;
- Transport infrastructure;
- Issues of land use and planning;
- Protecting natural assets and adapting to environmental change;
- Strengthening communities; and
- Health and social care.

Working groups were appointed to develop background papers on priority themes to help prepare the Parliament discussions. These covered issues such as the policy context, key issues, new practices and approaches to address these issues, and what the latest research is saying.

The first European Rural Parliament, in Brussels in November 2013, was initiated by the European Rural Community Alliance (ERCA), PREPARE Partnership for Rural Europe and the Nordic group of national rural movements, and the success of this will lead to a second event in 2015.

## Results

The main advantage of the Rural Parliament model is that it is very much stakeholder-led, addressing the issues by people talking to each other and coming up with ideas, rather than being dictated by policy or government intervention.

All the preparatory work meant that the Rural Parliament itself was able to focus on identifying solutions and the actions needed to overcome the challenges which we had identified.

The outcomes of the first Scottish parliament were all about empowerment, connectivity and sustainability. The recurrent theme underlying all of these was about local democracy; how decisions are made and who makes decisions that affect people at a local level.

An Action Plan will take these issues forward. It will look at the governance and role that the parliament will take, including actions such as advocacy and information sharing. A big positive is that the Scottish Government have committed to helping engage with major organisations to take this Action Plan forward.

150 people from 30 countries took part in the first EU Rural Parliament. Participants urged that the initiative continue, in order to strengthen the voice of rural people. So, ERCA and PREPARE, plus the European LEADER Association for Rural Development, are now preparing the second European Rural Parliament, to be held in November 2015. Over 300 people will attend, from 40 countries.

## Challenges and lessons

- ❑ The model for Rural Parliaments is every two years, so the next Scottish one will be in 2016. In the meantime, organisers will continue to engage through meetings across Scotland and on social media. It is important that this continues to be a participative democracy initiative, enabling people to represent themselves and their issues.
- ❑ The organisers in Scotland tried out Twitter debates on some themes in preparation for the first meeting. On average, the debates had around 50 participants and some interesting inputs, but some worked better than others. While social media can work for some, it is not a tool for everybody.
- ❑ The commitment is now required to consider if the rural parliament model can be developed elsewhere, and if previous success in influencing local action can be replicated.

## Additional information

[www.europeanruralparliament.com](http://www.europeanruralparliament.com)