

News Release

Thursday 7 February 2008, 12.30pm Committee Room 3, Scottish Parliament

Environmental and farming bodies call for the best use to be made of rural development funding.

Scotland's environmental bodies have today joined forces with farming and crofting representatives to call on politicians and policy makers to ensure that the best use is made of rural development funding.

At an event in the Scottish Parliament, held as part of "Scottish Environment Week", nine organisations will highlight the benefits that can be achieved for Scotland's environment, for farmers and crofters, for rural communities and for the rural economy, if rural development funds are adequate and wisely targeted. By highlighting positive examples, they hope to encourage a commitment to bolster this type of support in future.

Mandy Gloyer, Convenor of the Scottish Environment LINK Agriculture Taskforce, said, "We are at a critical time for the farmed environment in Scotland, with the imminent launch of the new Scottish Rural Development Programme, set to provide £1.6bn of funding over the next six years. We know that huge gains can be made for Scotland's natural and cultural heritage, and valuable income streams secured for Scotland's farmers and crofters, if this money is spent in the right ways and in the right places. In the past, however, Scotland's rural development funding has been the lowest in Europe, in relation to our farmed area, and our agri-environment programme has suffered as a result."

"The new SRDP has the potential to help Scotland's farmers and crofters play a huge role in achieving Scotland's environmental goals, but we must ensure that its priorities are properly resourced and that it provides credible opportunities for our land managers".

Jim Hume, MSP, who is hosting today's event, said "Agri environment or rural stewardship schemes are vital tools in allowing land managers to play an active part in looking after Scotland's biodiversity. Many projects would simply not be possible without funding through the agri schemes. So the provision of grants is essential in creating incentives for environmental initiatives which protect and develop our landscapes, which otherwise might prove too costly. An additional bonus of these schemes is that they support the retention and development of rural skills such as for example dyking and hedge management.

"The agri environment schemes can therefore be seen as an all encompassing tool – they help the environment, they help the economy with activities such as green tourism and they encourage employment opportunities for rural skills. We all use the phrase sustainable rural development and that's exactly what the agri schemes help in creating."

Editors' Notes

1. Scottish Environment LINK is the network for Scotland's voluntary sector environmental organisations. LINK has 34 member organisations spanning interests across the natural environment and associated cultural heritage and supported by around 500,000 people. Further information on LINK is available at www.scotlink.org.

2. The nine organisations participating in today's event are:

RSPB Scotland	Council for Scottish Archaeology	Woodland Trust Scotland
Soil Association Scotland	Ramblers' Association Scotland	FWAG Scotland
Scottish Crofting Foundation	National Farmers' Union Scotland	Scottish Crofting Foundation
Scottish Rural Property and Business Association		

Scottish Environment LINK is a Scottish charity under Scottish Charity No SC000296 and a Scottish company limited by guarantee and without share capital under Company No SC250899

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