

A Rural Parliament for Scotland

What's it all about?

The creation of a Rural Parliament for Scotland is a unique opportunity to enable a stronger, more coherent voice for Scotland's rural communities. It is inspired by the success of the Rural Parliaments in other European nations.

A successful Scottish Rural Parliament must be firmly rooted in Scotland's rural communities, developed by and for the people who live and work in rural Scotland.

It is supported by the Scottish Government to enable more effective engagement with Scotland's rural communities.

The seminar on May 29 2012 will be the first opportunity for representatives from across rural Scotland to hear directly from the European Rural Parliaments and to discuss the opportunities that this initiative may present for Scotland.

The event will be attended by representatives from rural communities, rural networks and third sector organisations, local and national government. This is an evolutionary process. Nothing has been decided and all views and ideas will be welcomed.

What is a Rural Parliament?

A 'Rural Parliament' is not a formal part of government, nor is it a parliament in the sense of a legislative or decision-making body. It is a 'bottom-up' process of involvement and debate between the people of rural Scotland and policy makers to enable better understanding, improved policy and action to address rural issues.

It is a process which takes place over a two-year period, culminating in a high profile event, the Rural Parliament, which brings together all sectors of rural society to highlight rural issues and to discuss rural priorities with each other and with Government.

It is focused on achieving practical and policy-based outcomes relevant to the challenges and opportunities facing rural people. These outcomes are monitored and further developed in the period between Rural Parliaments.

It has been proposed that a Scottish Rural Parliament should be:

- open to and inclusive of all who live and work in rural Scotland
- led by rural communities in co-operation with Government
- a forum for those who live and work in rural Scotland to discuss and debate issues of common concern and to share good practice, knowledge and inspiration
- an opportunity to celebrate and showcase the richness, diversity and success of Scotland's rural communities
- dedicated to identifying and promoting changes in policy and practice that will benefit Scotland's rural communities and achieving a coherent and influential rural voice
- part of a continuing process of engagement between Scotland's rural communities.

Why do we need it?

Scotland does not have a single mechanism for enabling a collective rural voice, inclusive of all interests and geographical areas. There are few opportunities for the collective interests of rural communities to be raised, debated and communicated to Government.

The lack of such a mechanism often results in issues being addressed sectorally or geographically, with no clear process for gaining a comprehensive, grass-roots view of rural issues. The evidence from other parts of Europe has revealed the benefits to rural areas of their Rural Parliaments in achieving this.

All rural communities face similar challenges and opportunities, and the Rural Parliament will provide the opportunity for communities across Scotland to come together for mutual benefit.

It is hoped that the proposed biennial gatherings of the Parliament will be just one element in the growth and development of a process of increased engagement and connection between Scotland's rural communities. ■