



Scottish Rural Parliament

Engaging Scotland's rural communities on Brexit

Policy Statement

WE CALL FOR:

1. Clear and direct UK and Scottish Government's commitment to equality for rural people, places and enterprise in Scotland

Rural and island communities in Scotland are fearful that our needs are unheard and will be unmet in the future by the UK and Scottish Government, which can feel distant and removed from our day to day lives. The EU brings a long history of support for peripheral rural and island areas which has had a significant impact on the sustainability and development of rural areas. We need reassurance through clear commitments that the UK and Scottish Government will continue to meet the needs of rural people, places and enterprises.

2. Responsive government and connected political leadership that engages with rural communities with regard to Brexit

There is a climate of uncertainty with a number of negative impacts, including an increasing lack of confidence now and in the future, leading to risk-aversion and apathy amongst rural businesses in particular. We need to see demonstrable and effective leadership that brings clarity and provides security to build confidence.

3. Reassurances that both the UK and Scottish Government will attract migrant workers and their families

There is deep concern in a number of sectors including tourism, health and agriculture that migrant worker numbers have already decreased to critical levels in some areas and will continue to decrease after Brexit. Current and future migrant workers and their families need to feel welcomed and have the right to remain. Processes to accept workers post Brexit need to positively empower by being accessible and straightforward. The Scottish Government should use its devolved powers to proactively attract and support workers from all communities.

4. Funding allocations to be made on an equitable basis for rural Scotland

There is concern about the level of resources that will be available to Scotland from the proposed UK Shared Prosperity Fund post-Brexit and a fear of increasing centralisation around resource allocation that would mitigate in favour of urban rather than rural areas. Recognising specific challenges and opportunities to remote, rural and island communities, consideration requires to be given to a fair and equitable distribution of resources to Scotland. There needs to be ring-fenced funding for rural areas and priorities in the budget process moving forward.

5. Place-based rural community and economic development

The LEADER and EMFF place-based, grassroots approach has contributed significantly to the fabric of Scottish rural life and economic development for over 20 years. At a time where rural communities are under most pressure, it is essential that steps are taken to secure the future of this approach and the funding that came with it from the European Union.

6. Government support to celebrate cultural diversity, community cohesion and resilience

There needs to be government support to promote the principles of wisdom, justice, compassion and integrity throughout society recognising the distinctive nature of our rural communities. There is a consensus that Brexit is interpreted by some as a valid platform for openly expressing views with a negative impact on cultural diversity. This includes the behaviour of politicians at a UK level around Brexit which has diminished public confidence and trust in national government leadership, ultimately impacting on perceptions of politicians in general. This is particularly the case in relation to immigration issues. A proactive approach is needed to develop community cohesion and address concerns of racism and xenophobia, and a clear message should be sent that this behaviour is not to be tolerated.

7. The UK Government to respect and commit to working with devolved governments throughout the transition from EU membership

It is evident that Scotland and the other UK devolved governments are being excluded from decision-making throughout the Brexit negotiations and will continue to be excluded through the re-shaping of policy post-EU membership. This contributes to a sense of ongoing powerlessness in rural communities. The voice of rural communities in Scotland can only be heard if the voices of our elected officials and unelected people are heard and respected, and approaches to participatory democracy are used to ensure we feel valued, respected and listened to. Devolved powers and responsibilities should remain devolved.

8. The recognition of the importance of an independent voice for rural communities in Scotland

An independent mechanism is essential to enable all voices of rural Scotland to be heard at every level and the appropriate forums to shape national policy for rural Scotland. Scottish Rural Action has emerged as a key voice for rural communities and requires appropriate resourcing and support to fulfil its potential.

9. Recognising that Brexit will have a detrimental effect on existing poverty and hardship in rural Scotland

We want rural communities to continue to have a strong collective voice, decision-making powers and investment to enable us to thrive and address the challenges of rural poverty, hardship and de-population in their own unique ways.

10. Valuing and maximising the diversity of the rural economy

The contribution of a diverse rural economy needs to be recognised as key to Scotland and the UK, with its high levels of talent, entrepreneurship and assets. There is concern that the historic and current neglect and continuing decline of some areas is not recognised. It is essential that the policy is sustainable, valuing collaboration and maximising the opportunities and connections between sectors and communities.