

# EU OUTER HEBRIDES LEADER/EMFF EVALUATION



MARCH 2021 • FINAL REPORT SUMMARY

## RESEARCH REPORT



The European Agricultural Fund  
for Rural Development:  
Europe investing in rural areas

marinescotland



Scottish Rural  
Development  
Programme

This project is part-financed by the Scottish Government and the European Community LEADER 2014-2020 Programme.



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## Introduction

Each Local Action Group (LAG) must carry out specific monitoring and evaluation activities linked to the Community Led Local Development (CLLD) strategy. The evaluation of LEADER/EMFF has a summative (accountability and transparency) and a formative function (collective learning). These evaluations tend to be undertaken prior to all projects completing which limits data.

## Research Methodology

In addition to an extensive reading list, Siar Management sought to elicit feedback from LEADER and EMFF applicants, LAG/FLAG members and LEADER/EMFF staff. Online surveys were used to engage with applicants and LAG/FLAG members along with follow-up workshops. Research undertaken into funding gaps for LEADER in 2020 also contributed to the data used in analysis.

A total of 24 applicant survey responses were received as well as 9 LAG/FLAG survey responses. Separate LEADER and EMFF applicant workshops were delivered involving a total of 11 attendees. The Funding Gaps Study contributed intelligence from online workshops/meetings attended by 34 parties plus 69 completed surveys.

## Key Findings

- Strategic Objectives were delivered to varying degrees, there was a strong bias towards local services/facilities and tourism with limited focus on climate change and energy projects for LEADER
- For EMFF Objectives, *'Increase fisheries area employment and competitiveness by promoting fisheries sustainability and diversification of fishing effort'* and *'Develop alternative fisheries area employment through business diversification'* were the most frequently addressed whereas *'Increase onshore added value activity utilising locally caught product'* featured least
- Financial management has become the primary gauge of success for LEADER and EMFF, however, overall impact is difficult to measure as LEADER has a perplexing array of project-based targets/outputs/outcomes and EMFF has no discernible measurement framework
- The majority of funding across the two programmes was awarded to community organisations as expected, private businesses also featured in both, but public agencies and trade bodies received (limited) support only under EMFF
- Based on the data available, LEADER created/safeguarded 92 jobs and EMFF created/safeguarded 48 jobs
- LEADER awarded over 50% of funds to local authority Wards 1-3 and EMFF funds were distributed at 40% to Ward 1 and 38% to Ward 3
- Since the original programme in 1991-1993, LEADER funding appears to have evolved into larger sums towards key sectors, as general grant funding for businesses and community groups has reduced and loans have taken more prominence
- Complex bureaucracy and information management systems tend to squeeze out smaller projects and organisations with limited resources – applicant feedback suggests it is not possible to deliver LEADER projects, in particular, with volunteers only
- Gaps for smaller community projects/organisations have more recently been filled by the Crown Estate Fund to a certain extent
- Non-recurring revenue support for businesses and revenue/core funding for community groups are vital in remoter areas as well as essential for co-operation projects
- LEADER Youth LAG accelerated engagement with young people
- As LEADER, in particular, has been increasingly 'mainstreamed' to engage with key sectors and businesses, policy development and project evaluation increases in importance - these should ideally be addressed pro-actively rather than reactively

- More animation leads to more socially innovative and diverse projects that extend LEADER's reach across communities and sectors; less animation leads to a more reactive approach that favours well-resourced and more experienced organisations and businesses
- Accessibility of the LEADER/EMFF team and the valuable advice/support provided to projects throughout the project lifecycle were appreciated by applicants and LAG/FLAG members
- Risk management tools tend to be static and focused on financial performance rather than the objectives and aspirations of the Local Development Strategy
- LAG/FLAG attendance varied over the programme giving rise to inquorate meetings on a number of occasions.

## Recommendations

The recommendations identified are as follows:

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| <b>One</b>   | Undertake policy development, such as sectoral priorities and geographical targeting, proactively and refine in practice as necessary  |
| <b>Two</b>   | Review LAG/FLAG member participation preferences, explore ways of creating greater engagement and maximise online video technology   |
| <b>Three</b> | Prepare an indicative spend profile at the start of the next cycle to guide LAG/FLAG members in terms of project spend and avoid an unnecessarily early closure of programmes  |
| <b>Four</b>  | Draw on best practice to reduce programme bureaucracy, such as moving away from paying on receipted expenditure to paying on invoice, as has been implemented by other funding bodies  |
| <b>Five</b>  | Rationalise the number of LEADER Performance Indicators to reduce administration for applicants and staff, and to produce more valuable information to measure programme success, and give consideration to establishing local monitoring and evaluation of longer-term impacts and benefits |
| <b>Six</b>   | Develop a more LDS-focused risk management process to address the achievement of strategic objectives and aspirations during programmes  |
| <b>Seven</b> | Consider constituting the LAG/FLAG partnership and potentially developing a multi-funding delivery model that would be acceptable to key stakeholders.   |





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