



2025 European Rural Parliament and the Declaration of Inverurie

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- ▶ The 6th European Rural Parliament, The Rural Youth Parliament, and the First Michael Dower Memorial Award Ceremony, were held just 2 weeks ago, from the 20th to the 23rd of October in Inverurie, Scotland.
- ▶ This remarkable, and in my view, highly successful event was organised by a combined team, many of whom were volunteers or who gave time above and beyond their paid responsibility.
- ▶ They comprised my fellow colleagues in ERCA, PREPARE, ELARD and RURAL YOUTH EUROPE as well as the generous support of Aberdeen Council, some significant private sector sponsorship, and the support in kind and finance from the Scottish Government.
- ▶ But first among equals was the immense contribution of the Scottish Rural Action, in their easily recognisable yellow shirts, who delivered as much and more of what they promised when tendering to host the Gathering.
- ▶ Politicians, policy makers from across Europe, both rural and urban, should benefit from the core work, the basic understanding and the benefit of listening, debating and prioritisation of the European Rural Parliament.

- ▶ Over 400 attendees from some 40 European Countries participated, bringing knowledge, experiences, passion and constructive suggestions for the future of Rural Europe into some 29 workshops, panels, summits and plenaries. They also brought expectations, affirmed principles for community led development and a wee dram of humour, a kilt full of determination and a sporon full of optimism at a time of real concern and insecurity.
- ▶ However, the ERP did not stop at lunchtime on the 23rd. It would be a betrayal of such effort and consolidated thinking for us to draw a line and walk away to the next ERP in some two years' time. The Gathering produced a very good Declaration, available now on the [ERP website](#), emphasising the principles that should underpin future rural policies, building on what worked well in the past and what was demonstrated to us, and inspired us on the excellent site visits, where theory around private and community business innovation, backed by an enabling intermediary structure, was put into practice.

- ▶ The Declaration belongs to all the attendees and we should all promote it from the local to the regional to national parliaments and the EU Commission. It is a priceless gift.
- ▶ And beyond the Declaration and to help further discussion, we will soon distil the detailed work and outcomes of the workshops and panels. If we believe in full participative democracy, these findings deserve to be fully discussed in transparent engagement with policy makers. We already have a Memorandum of Understanding with the European Economic and Social Committee, for which we are grateful, and wish to see more formal engagement with other governmental and advisory statutory bodies. The invite to participate here today is another recognition of what the ERP can contribute to the next MAFF Policy and financial framework.
- ▶ Of course, the next European Programming period and its financial framework has to recognise the most recent challenges of military conflict, of global climate change, of technological advances, and of economic, social and generational behavioural changes. It has to recognise and to adapt, as will all national, regional and local decision makers.
- ▶ We, who continuously work in and campaign for Rural Europe have also to be realistic. We have to demonstrate savings to make investments but governments have to make rural investments also to make savings. Given our knowledge and experience of what works well and what does not, we also believe that we can contribute to smarter use of resources, not least, the harnessing and empowering of local community, grassroot talent, economic and social investment. One euro of public investment will realise 4-5 euros of local community leverages and improvement dividends. That empowerment, needs the partnership of relevant research, good governance and some financial and technical draw down of governmental support and investment.

- ▶ One of the key phrases from the Declaration is, “We do not ask for help, we ask for support in partnership.” And partnership is not token consultation, irregular, short notice meetings, we talk, you listen and if there’s time, we will let you say a few words after the last train home! DG AGRI’s Civil Dialogue Groups have been informative with good exchanges but they don’t feed back to close the circle on debate, and organised dialogue with DG REGIO and the other Commission Directorates with rural representatives have to be much stronger in the future Programming Period if there is to be real partnership and joint planning and measurement. Rural stakeholders have rights to be heard across governmental departments and not just pigeonholed into the sympathetic DG AGRI boiler-room!
- ▶ Always accepting, of course, that proper consultation and engagement and feedback has a financial implication for NGOs which, in mature relationships is a just partnership expectation, which the European Commission, to its credit, recognises.
- ▶ The clear message from the ERP is that Europe needs to reinvigorate the Long Term Vision for a more sustainable, inclusive and resilient rural area. A rural that is plural, holistic and with a stronger understanding of the interdependence with urban communities.

- ▶ We are seriously concerned that any delegation of responsibility from the Commission to Member States, especially without any regional dimension, might lose sight of the Long Term Vision, the holistic approach to our rural communities and that the potential threat to instruments such as LEADER and CLLD will lead to a serious reversion of rural wide development, of rural specific and targeted policies, and a loss of measurable rural proofing at all levels. Rural proofing works best at all levels where there are statutory, legislative powers, where there are identifiable departmental champions, methodology - templates and constant pressure from civil society representatives.
- ▶ Rural Europe has so much potential but is also very fragile.
- ▶ Please do not throw away the progress made.

- ▶ We fully support Commissioner Hansen's genuine commitment to generational renewal for farmers. But this should also apply to other rural businesses. We need the well- trained, digitally adept, innovative next generation to create and modernise rural businesses towards economic and social sustainability.
- ▶ While the CAP Network has provided much valuable learning, based on inclusive listening with stakeholders for its priorities. We must not lose this facility and it must retain its licence to consider all aspects of rural good practice both within and outside the EU.
- ▶ The same should apply to the Horizon Research Fund where Cluster 6 has been and is producing new knowledge, although it should be even more accessible to smaller NGOs for local priorities, while the Rural Observatory, if it had a standing civil society advisory board, could provide the relevant statistical data, always a necessity, to make credible arguments.

- ▶ The Action plans for delivery, which include the PACT, need to ensure a fit for purpose assessment with all stakeholders. Plurality and place-based policies should not mean a reversion into departmental silos, closed budgets and inflexibility, nor should it be a bureaucratic burden at the point of delivery. However, the Declaration specifically calls for ring fenced rural budgets in all countries and regions, based on feared vulnerability, missed renewal opportunities and any failure of rural proofing.
- ▶ This is not an impossible dream. IT NEEDS COMMITMENT, DETERMINATION and EMPATHY from leaders at all levels, learning from good practice wherever that exists.
- ▶ All Europe shall live is the continuous cry from national Rural Parliaments and the ERP. We are here to play our part.



2025 DECLARATION OF INVERURIE

**We, the people of rural areas, hold the keys to the solutions Europe needs.
We come from all generations and all corners of rural Europe: young and old, women
and men, those born here and those newly arrived, from mainland and islands, coasts,
valleys and mountains alike.**

**We are capable. We are strong communities. We create essential solutions for life
together, on the ground. We are and we have what keeps Europe competitive, in
solidarity and resilient.**

**We call for recognition, support and genuine partnership, not barriers that slow down
the change we are already driving.**

<https://europeanruralparliament.com/the-6th-erp-gathering/declaration-of-inverurie/>



Thank you!

Join the Rural Pact Community and online platform

www.ruralpact.rural-vision.europa.eu/become-member_en



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