
EUROPEAN MARITIME FISHERIES FUND 2014 -2020 - UPDATE

Report by Service Director Strategy & Policy

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

09 June 2015

1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report provides an update to the report to Economic Development Group on 11 September 2014 on EU local development funding for the period 2014 – 2020, and in particular to activity and progress in securing an allocation of European Maritime Fisheries Fund (EMFF) for the Scottish Borders.**
- 1.2 The Scottish Borders Fisheries Local Action Group (FLAG), which will be responsible for EMFF local development funding decisions, developed a proposal in 2014 to merge with the East Lothian FLAG in recognition of the strong links between these local fishing areas.
- 1.3 The Scottish Government has subsequently proposed a more regionalised approach to Fisheries Local Action Groups (FLAGs). This is a change of approach and there is a risk that it will result in a delay to the launch and implementation of the local development funding programme. The fishing sector and the local authorities are concerned that this delay will have an adverse effect on programme delivery.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **I recommend that the Executive Committee:-**
 - a) Notes the delay in the introduction of European Maritime Fisheries Funding 2014 – 2020 local development funding.**
 - b) Requests clarification from the Scottish Government on its revised proposals for 'regionalising' Fisheries Local Action Groups in Scotland, given that Local Action Groups are predicated on coherence between areas in terms of their geography, commercial relationships and fishing practices.**
 - c) Asks the Chief Executive to write to the Scottish Government, formally raising the Council's concern about the delay in implementing EMFF local development funding in East Berwickshire.**

3 Background – European Maritime Fisheries Fund 2014 – 2020

- 3.1 A single Local Development Strategy to support Scottish Borders' bids for local development funding from two European funds 2014 – 2020 has been approved in principle by the Scottish Government. One fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, will support the LEADER Programme, while the other fund, the European Maritime Fisheries Fund (EMFF), will support the sea fishing industry and activity in fishing communities in the Berwickshire Coast area.
- 3.2 Both funds allocate approximately 5% of their total programme budget to Community-Led Local Development programmes. These programmes are managed by 'Local Action Groups' which determine and implement the strategy and make decisions on local investments. The funds are targeted at support for the development and diversification of rural and fisheries economies at the local level.
- 3.3 The 2011 – 2013 Eyemouth and East Berwickshire European Fisheries Fund - Fisheries Local Action Group (EFF - FLAG) programme is coming to an end and final project claims are due in June 2015. Progress towards the approval of a new programme has been delayed by Scottish Government following a change of approach concerning the future FLAG areas.

4 EMFF 'Regionalisation'

- 4.1 There are natural links between the fishing communities of East Berwickshire and East Lothian, so the Scottish Borders Local Development Strategy proposed to set up a joint Fisheries Local Action Group that would cover both areas for the new 2014 – 2020 funding period. It was understood that this joint approach fitted with the Scottish Government's plans for EMFF 2014 – 2020; funding allocations would be made against each area's Local Development Strategy separately and then managed by a joint FLAG. Staffing and other costs would be shared across both Council areas.
- 4.2 Marine Scotland, the relevant Scottish Government Directorate, has subsequently indicated that it wants Fisheries Local Action Groups across Scotland to take a more regional approach. It has proposed the mergers of a number of FLAGs. Marine Scotland staff proposed that the joint Scottish Borders and East Lothian area should be expanded to include Fife. This would mean that three different Council areas would be included in the joint FLAG for the 2014 - 2020 programme.
- 4.3 Officers from the three local authorities met and advised Marine Scotland that the linkages across the Firth of Forth were not strong and that there would be practical difficulties in managing a Fisheries Local Action Group, and arranging local meetings, across such a wide geographic area. Marine Scotland has responded that it still intends to follow the regional approach, although there has not yet been a formal announcement of the new proposals or any clear information on how they may work in practice.
- 4.4 The three areas have developed separate Local Development Strategies to support their bids for Rural (LEADER) and Fisheries (EMFF) funds. This means that the priorities of the three strategies may not fully align, raising the prospect that the FLAG would be asked to apply different criteria to applications from different areas.
- 4.5 The strength of the FLAG approach is based on the local knowledge of its membership. The Fisheries Local Action Group partners give their time on a voluntary basis and they make funding decisions for the benefit of their

communities. A regional FLAG would dilute this local knowledge and representatives would potentially be asked to make decisions about projects in communities that they had never or rarely visited.

- 4.6 Additionally, it is not clear how effective project development and support for applicants would be if provided across a wider area. There are two likely options for the management of a regional FLAG across three local authority areas. Firstly, one local authority, acting as lead partner, takes responsibility for managing the programme, and employs the key staff. In the second option, Marine Scotland would take the lead role and employ the personnel required to support the FLAG.
- 4.7 In the event that one local authority acts as lead partner, it is likely that Scottish Borders Council would take this role if, as expected, East Berwickshire has a larger funding allocation than other areas in the regional group.
- 4.8 Although there could clearly be a loss of local input and influence in relation to the new Programme, the key issue is the delay that these changes are likely to bring to the approval and commencement of the new EMFF Programme. The previous fisheries programme provided support to a range of projects in the coastal area, and officers are concerned that the delay in opening the new Programme may in turn cause delays for potential projects in East Berwickshire. Officers consider that this issue is now significant enough for the Council to write formally to Scottish Government and express concern about the delay.

5 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Financial

It is unlikely that there will be any additional costs to the Council attached to any of the recommendations contained in this report. There may be financial implications for projects in the area if the programme is delayed, which may result in a reduced programme impact.

5.2 Risk and Mitigations

The delay in programme implementation will cause a loss of momentum and continuity in the delivery of FLAG local development activity, and potentially disillusionment in the target audience for these development funds. The delay in starting the Programme will require implementation to be carried out in a restricted period, which may have an adverse effect on the range and quality of projects brought forward by applicants. A formal letter of concern to Scottish Government may help mitigate these delays and demonstrates to the Government the importance that the Council attaches to the EMFF Programme for the East Berwickshire area.

5.3 Equalities

An Equalities Impact Assessment will be carried out on the Local Development Strategy. EU programmes are required to support equalities and diversity.

5.4 Acting Sustainably

The EMFF local development programme supports sustainable economic growth, social inclusion and the development of additional employment opportunities. The Local Development Strategy is clear that project sustainability is an important factor in the project

assessment and approval procedure.

5.5 Carbon Management

There are no direct implications for the Council's carbon emissions from this proposal. It is likely that some of the projects that are delivered as part of the Programme will be related to low carbon innovation and improvements.

5.6 Rural Proofing

Rural proofing is not required because this project does not change Council strategy or policy. The Scottish Borders EMFF programme will be open to all communities in its defined area, and will have a positive impact on the coastal zone of the Scottish Borders. The delay in programme implementation may have financial implications for applicants, which may result in a reduced programme impact.

5.7 Changes to Scheme of Administration or Scheme of Delegation

There are no changes to be made.

6 CONSULTATION

- 6.1 The Chief Financial Officer, the Monitoring Officer, the Chief Legal Officer, the Service Director Strategy and Policy, the Chief Officer Audit and Risk, the Chief Officer HR and the Clerk to the Council have been consulted and their comments have been incorporated into the report.

Approved by

David Cressey

Signature

Service Director Strategy & Policy

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Background Papers: None

Previous Minute Reference: Economic Development Group
- Future of EU Funding, 11 September 2014

Note – You can get this document on tape, in Braille, large print and various computer formats by contacting the address below. Hugh Williams can also give information on other language translations as well as providing additional copies.

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