

APPENDIX 2
POLICY BACKGROUND

The objectives of any AE scheme agreement should fit into the objectives of a hierarchy of bureaucracy from the European Union level through national targets, to the scheme, local targets within schemes and down to the objectives of the individual agreement.

European Policy

Agri-environment schemes began in Europe voluntarily following Regulation 797/85 and compulsorily after Regulation 2078/92.

More recently rural development in the European Union has been defined legally by the following directives: 1257/1999; 1750/1999; 2603/1999; 445/2002

These directives link rural development to the funding of agriculture in a fundamental way.

Agenda 2000 are the reforms of the Common agricultural policy of the EU. The new rural development policy, now the “second pillar” of the Common Agricultural Policy, meets these needs. As an essential part of the European agricultural model, it aims to put in place a consistent and lasting framework for guaranteeing the future of rural areas and promoting the maintenance and creation of employment.

The principles are as follows:

- The **multifunctionality of agriculture**, i.e. its varied role over and above the production of foodstuffs. This implies the recognition and encouragement of the range of services provided by farmers.
- A **multisectoral and integrated** approach to the rural economy in order to diversify activities, create new sources of income and employment and protect the rural heritage.
- **Flexible** aids for rural development, based on subsidiarity and promoting decentralisation, consultation at regional, local and partnership level.
- **Transparency** in drawing up and managing programmes, based on simplified and more accessible legislation.

One of the main innovations in this policy is the method used to improve integration between the different types of intervention, to help ensure smooth and balanced development in all European rural areas. The main features of this development can be defined as follows:

- strengthening the agricultural and forestry sector
- improving the competitiveness of rural areas
- preserving the environment and rural heritage

A consequence of the EU directives is that each nation has had to produce its own rural development plan. Agri-environment schemes in England now fall within the LEADER + programme of the European Union that has the following objectives:

- The Commission has approved on 14 August 2001 the programme for the Community Initiative Leader+ in England. During the period 2001-2006, the total expenditure under the programme is EUR 119.2 million. This includes a contribution from EAGGF Guidance Section of EUR 54.3 million and a contribution of EUR 10.6 million from the private sector.
- The programme covers all the rural areas of England. The Leader+ programme aims to pilot with new ideas to contribute to a more sustainable society, economy and environment for rural England. These will be developed under the following themes; the use of know how and new technology to make the products and services of rural areas more competitive, improving the quality of life in rural communities, adding value to local products and, making the best use of natural and cultural resources. The programme identifies five target groups; women, young people, the older population, unemployed and underemployed and rural businesses and workers affected by rural restructuring. The English LAGs will complement their own activities by developing co-operation with other LAGs both within the UK and with transnational partnerships.
- It is expected that the programme will support around 23 Local Action Groups (LAGs) selected in England and these LAGs will be supported by the UK national network The Leader+ programme for England provides the legal and financial framework for the LAGs. However, in order to ensure a bottom-up approach, each LAG will define their own measures and specific goals based on the particular characteristics of their area. These will be set out in development plans drawn up by the LAGs themselves. The selection of the LAGs by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) will be based on the merits of these development plans.

Making the best uses of natural and cultural resources is intimately linked to the agri-environment schemes.

Further to their place in rural development plans the agri-environment schemes are seen as a way of delivering the targets of the Rio convention.

The EU has provided a list of common evaluation criteria for rural development with questions and indicators as outlined in Regulation 1750/1997. For agri-environment schemes section I.6 is relevant:

I.6. To what extent have supported investments facilitated environmentally friendly farming?

I.6-1. Integration of environmental concerns into farm investments

I.6-1.1. Share of beneficiary holdings introducing environmental improvements thanks to the co-financing (%)

(a) of which with the environmental improvement as the direct aim of the investment (%)

- (b) of which as a collateral effect (e.g., due to new equipment acquired mainly for economic purposes) (%)
- (c) of which relating to waste and excess manure (%)
- (d) of which relating to on-farm water management (%)
- (e) of which relating to (other) benign farming practices/systems (%)

The evaluations carried out in most countries have been based on uptake figures alone and although they answer the criteria, they do not give an understanding of the impact of the schemes on wildlife. Only the monitoring of schemes by nations such as the UK has addressed the processes that are at work within the uptake figures.

England

In 2000 the government published the England Rural Development Plan. Biodiversity goals are to be achieved through the Environmentally Sensitive Areas Scheme (ESAs) and the Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CSS). The following text outlining one departmental position comes from the "Guidance on UK Priority Habitats" (Ovenden & Turner 2001):

- Agri-environment scheme agreements need to take account of Government commitments to the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP). A large number of the published BAPs contain explicit actions for DEFRA and other agriculture departments to consider and address though the agri-environment schemes that they operate.
- DEFRA's policy position on how Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) habitats and species should be handled in CSS is set out in general terms in the public policy document "MAFF's role in implementing the Biodiversity Action Plans". This highlights the role that quinquennial policy reviews and county targeting will have in modifying the scheme to take account of biodiversity (and other) objectives. These two processes will have a significant effect on the achievement of biodiversity objectives by the scheme, but this does not reduce the primary importance of evaluating the wildlife value of each application on its own merit.
- The major contribution of the ESA and Countryside Stewardship schemes to biodiversity will be through measures to address the priority habitats, with benefits for priority species being largely indirect through the habitat measures. However, individual agreements may be tailored to address species requirements where appropriate.

Regions

The CSS has overall scheme objectives and different landscape types and counties have their own target objectives relating to local biodiversity. The degree to which these are tied to local Agenda 2000 BAP targets is unclear (to the authors of this report). Each ESA has its own objectives that are related to local landscape and biodiversity objectives. Both the objectives for CSS and ESAs were originally written before the national and local BAP targets were developed and therefore are not linked directly.

Agreements

Each CSS agreement should include objectives tailored to the land under that agreement. These individual objectives usually come from a generic stock of phrases but some individual agreements have objectives for individual species or features. The quality of the objectives is variable but has been improving (Carey *et al* 2001b) as the collective knowledge of project officers has increased.

Only the most recent ESA agreements have similar objectives and these are for agreements with management plans.

Future Developments

It is likely that following the review currently being undertaken by DEFRA that the agri-environment schemes will be modified or new schemes will be created. There is debate as to whether these schemes will be “narrow and deep” or “broad and shallow”. Narrow and deep schemes would highlight priority habitats and species with detailed and expensive management on a few sites whereas broad and shallow schemes would have basic management to improve the countryside as a whole.