

Introduction

This Executive Summary presents the main findings of an independent evaluation of the Moray LEADER Programme 2014-2020. The evaluation was commissioned by **tsiMORAY**, the Accountable Body responsible for implementation of the programme, and was undertaken between September and December 2020 by Ekos Ltd. The research involved a review of relevant information and data, alongside consultation and survey work with stakeholders and projects funded through the programme.

Programme Development and Delivery

LEADER is the European Union's place-based, participatory and bottom-up approach to rural development. In Scotland there are 21 Local Action Groups (LAGs), which support delivery of area-based Local Development Strategies (LDS). Through this, each LAG provides funding for projects that address its key objectives and priorities. This approach has also been adopted for the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF), which supports development in fishing and coastal communities, through Fisheries Local Action Groups (FLAGs). For the 2014-2020 FLAG Programme, Moray was merged with the Highland region.

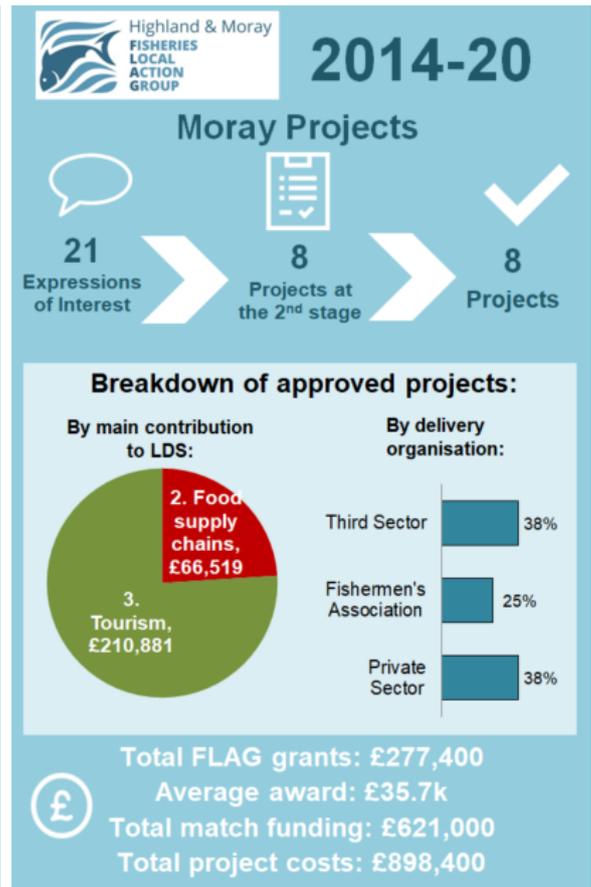
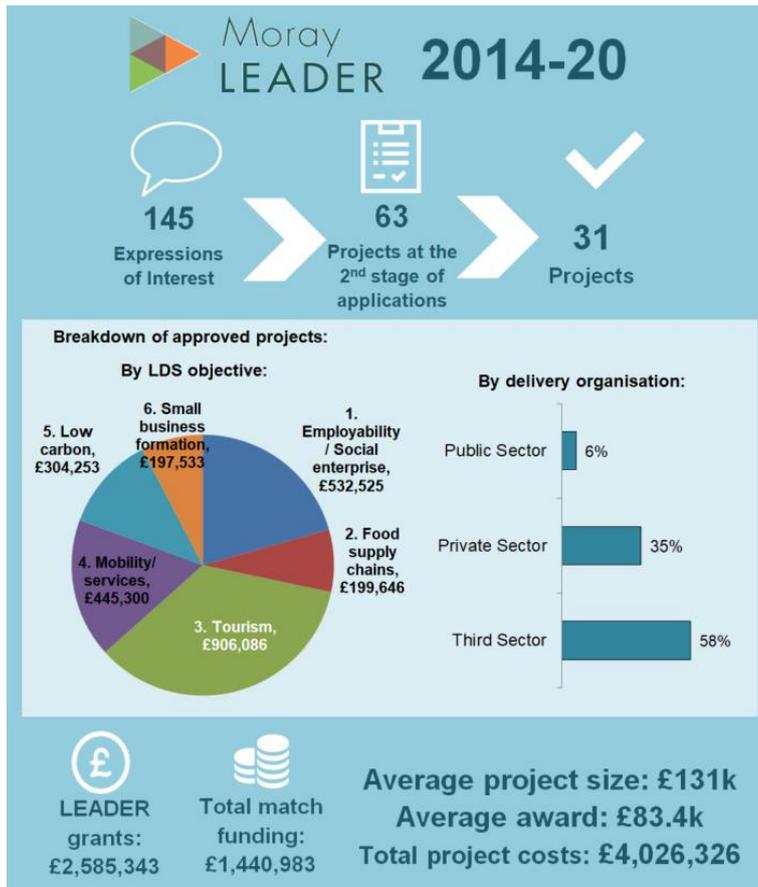
Each LAG an LEADER programme is overseen by an Accountable Body. The Accountable Body for the Moray LEADER Programme 2014-2020 has been **tsiMORAY**, the third sector interface for Moray – a unique set-up in Scotland. Moray Council have continued to carry out administrative responsibilities for the FLAG, working alongside Highland Council.

The timeline (right) shows the main milestones in programme development and delivery.



LDS Programme Performance

The Moray LAG and Highland and Moray FLAG, and supporting staff teams, considered applications for project funding over two stages, appraising them against the objectives set out in the LDS, and in the case of the FLAG, the FLAG Funding Priorities. The graphics below show an overview of the projects awarded and their contribution to the LDS.



As per programme Project Register 14/12/2020

Progress Against Targets

The LDS set out performance indicators, presenting targets for each of its 6 strategic objectives. Applicants were asked to specify which indicators were most relevant to their project and to provide quantified targets. Progress against the forecast targets has been monitored by the LEADER staff team – the figures at the time of the evaluation reporting (right) show 9 of 12 objectives have been met.

Note: Seven projects were still to provide final monitoring figures.

Indicator	% Meeting LDS Target
Number of participants becoming engaged (or re-engaged) in working with social enterprises	66%
Number of third sector organisations supported	330%
Number of new (or new to local food) initiatives dealing with local food supply chains	140%
Number of supported initiatives in farm/estate sector	20%
Number of collaborative products among tourism providers	180%
Number of quality enhanced tourism related businesses/attractions in rural and or coastal Moray	160%
Number of initiatives supported to enhance access to services and opportunities for households and communities currently access-deprived	240%
Number of community energy initiatives	67%
Number of businesses adopting low-carbon technology	100%
Number of businesses with renewables related activity as part of their business portfolio	133%
Number of local businesses developing new markets outwith the local area supported for business/market development	133%
Number of local businesses supported to provide substitute goods and services for goods and services currently imported from outwith the local area	167%

Feedback from Grant Recipients

23 LEADER projects (74% of the total) took part in survey work in support of the research. Key findings were:

- there were some challenges with the application process, particularly the IT system (LARCs);
- support from the LEADER staff team was rated very highly: 91% rated the overall quality of interaction and support as very good or good;
- overall, there were high ratings for the project management, monitoring and claims processes, with some concerns about the time it took for claims to be paid;
- nearly all funded organisations (96%) identified an internal benefit, such as new relationships or partnerships, or increased knowledge of their community or customers;
- most projects reported at least one economic benefit (87%), such as new/supported jobs or a new enterprise;
- at least one business benefit was reported by most projects (83%), including a new product or service (74%);
- 83% identified at least one community benefit, e.g. improved access to services/opportunities (61%) and engaging with volunteers (57%);
- 70% reported at least one environment, culture or tourism benefit, including enhanced tourism/leisure activities (39%) and enhanced biodiversity/environment (39%);
- more than half (57%) said that their project would not have gone ahead at all without the grant support;
- the key challenge experienced by projects was the unforeseen impact of Covid-19; and
- overall, projects were very grateful for the support and funding they have received.

Conclusions

The LEADER Approach in Moray: the Local Action Group has functioned effectively with a good level of representation. There were some issues with an outdated/'inherited' LDS by the time the programme got underway, although the refresh in early 2018 was felt to have been helpful in this regard. There were challenges with developing cooperation projects – a key aspect of LEADER – but a strong drive to do so and successful collaborations were achieved.

A Third Sector Accountable Body: the appointment of **tsiMORAY** as both Accountable Body and delivery organisation for LEADER was unique in Scotland. There is a consensus that it has worked well and in many areas exceeded expectations. **tsiMORAY** were able to bring a wealth of local connections and experience of providing advice and support to community organisations to the programme, supporting the perception of the programme being accessible and available. However, the LAG were unable to 'over-allocate' their budget, as this presented an unmanageable risk for the Accountable Body.



Moray LEADER Programme 2014-2020

Evaluation Findings - Summary

Progress against objectives: with the first projects not getting underway until early 2018, the time available to distribute the funding and fulfil the LDS objectives was always under pressure. In particular, where any of the LDS objectives were underserved by the mix of EoIs and full applications received, there was limited time available to try and animate new projects that fulfilled them. In spite of this, and with some projects still to provide final figures, very good progress has been made against the LDS objectives.

Relationships between key partners: with little continuity from the previous iterations of LEADER in Moray, aside from some LAG members, relationships between key partners were being built afresh – albeit from a position where tsiMORAY were already well connected across the LDS area. The Scottish Government, as Managing Authority of the SRDP, was highly supportive of the new delivery model from the start, and relations have been positive. In practice, the relationship between the FLAG and the LAG or LEADER staff was limited – a result of the changed FLAG geography and different delivery bodies.

Benefits and impacts: evidence of project benefits and impacts has been derived from monitoring data submitted by each projects, and supported by information gathered through the evaluation primary research. This has included the creation of new products and services, volunteers engaging with projects, employment created and safeguarded, people participating in learning and training, organisations working together, and events being held. The majority of funded organisations reported that their project will definitely leave a lasting legacy in Moray (83%), and the remainder (17%) that it maybe will.

National areas of focus: six national priorities were established during the 2014-2020 programme: improving local facilities and services; stimulating the local economy; building community capacity and creating more vibrant communities; benefitting hard to reach groups; achieving partnership working and co-operation; and enhancing biodiversity and environmental sustainability. Moray LEADER has contributed across these.

Lessons learned: the new Accountable Body and staff team brought an added impetus and real commitment to make the programme a success. However, it also meant that lessons were not carried over from previous programme, and the time taken to put appropriate systems in place before applications could be accepted led to a relatively late start date of mid-2017. The involvement of tsiMORAY, the LAG and staff team at an earlier stage, from LDS development onwards, would have helped build awareness of the programme and supported them in gaining an early understanding of processes, priorities and potential projects.