Rural Development: Environmental Co-operation Action Fund full guidance

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Introduction

The Environmental Co-operation Action Fund (ECAF) promotes the delivery of landscape-scale environmental projects by groups of farmers, foresters and other land managers.

Some environmental objectives are most effective at a scale greater than individual holdings – for example, throughout an entire water catchment or deer range. This often requires co-ordinated activity by groups of land managers.

The Environmental Co-operation Action Fund supports the costs of planning and facilitating these co-operative projects, in order to deliver the following environmental priorities throughout Scotland:

- Habitat and Degraded Ecosystem Restoration
- Conservation of Vulnerable Priority Species
- Control of Invasive Non-Native Plant Species
- Deer Management
- Catchment Management for Water Quality
- Physical Restoration of Water Bodies
- Natural Flood Management
- Woodland Creation

Use the links above to read about these priorities in greater detail.

A total of £10 million will be available between 2015 and 2020 to fund co-operative projects that help to deliver these priorities.

Applications may subsequently be made to the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme and / or the Forestry Grant Scheme and / or other public funding to support the delivery of these projects on the ground by land managers participating in the co-operative group. The Environmental Co-operation Action Fund will fund the facilitation of co-operation before and after these applications are made but will not fund the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme, the Forestry Grant Scheme or other public funding applications themselves.

The Environmental Co-operation Action Fund will help to:

- deliver the 2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity
- contribute to Scotland's world-leading climate change targets
- meet obligations to improve water quality and the physical restoration of rivers under the EU Water Framework Directive
- control flooding through natural flood management

The scheme is delivered jointly by the Rural Payments and Inspections Division of the Scottish Government, Scottish Natural Heritage, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and Forestry Commission Scotland.

Who can apply

Applications can only be submitted by:

- an individual or appointed facilitator who has identified the need for a landscape-scale environmental project and intends to develop and deliver collaborative action with relevant land holdings and key stakeholders

or

- an organisation that wishes to appoint a facilitator. If applying through this route you must be one of the following:

1. a public sector organisation
2. a private sector organisation
3. a constituted not-for-profit organisation

4. a constituted group

If you are applying to the fund, and have not yet appointed a named facilitator, you must provide evidence that you are one of the organisations or groups listed above, as well as the job description and person specification for the facilitator you intend to appoint.

In this situation, the application will automatically receive the minimum assessment score for the various aspects of the facilitator's knowledge and expertise, as this will not be known at the point of application. If successful, the award would be approved in principle, subject to the employment of a suitable individual.

Public bodies are eligible to apply. They, and other organisations, must meet the following criteria:

- both the facilitation and the environmental activities are additional to the delivery of their statutory duties, core functions and routine, recurrent activity
- projects make a clear and significant contribution to their chosen Environmental Co-operation Action Fund priority
- they involve relevant public bodies – which could include Scottish Natural Heritage, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency or Forestry Commission Scotland – and other stakeholders or local communities in the delivery of shared environmental outcomes

The Scottish Government, Forestry Commission Scotland, Scottish Environment Protection Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage cannot apply for funding under the Environmental Co-operation Action Fund, due to their role in administering it.

The Scottish Rural Network website provides a 'co-operation offers' tool that people can use to post their ideas and / or search for potential project partners. To register for the website and post your ideas, go to www.ruralnetwork.scot/user/register.

Registered users can also choose to make their details publicly available through an online 'contact card'. You can search the contact cards to identify experts / professionals you may wish to seek advice from or commission to help deliver your project.

Please note, however, that the information added by users is not evaluated and should not be viewed as an endorsement by the Scottish Rural Network. It is an online tool to enable people interested in rural development to find and connect with each other.

What will the facilitators do?

The aim of the Environmental Co-operation Action Fund is to fund individuals to carry out the planning and facilitation of co-operative activities with the purpose of encouraging environmental outcomes at a landscape scale.

The following activities are a guide to those expected, but projects are not limited to these:

- raising awareness with the public and stakeholders
- identifying potential land-manager participants
- securing participation
- evidence gathering
- producing a strategic management plan
- producing individual holding-scale plans
- consulting agencies and / or applying for consents needed
- overseeing project delivery, including reporting and aspects of monitoring

Most of the facilitation activities will be carried out prior to participants applying for further funding (Agri-Environment Climate Scheme, Forestry Grant Scheme or other sources). Facilitation activities that support the participants during implementation of the environmental outcomes may also be eligible (with the exception of the Woodland Creation priority where only work prior to land managers beginning environmental work is eligible). Further explanations of these activities can be found in the Eligible costs and verification section.

To carry out these activities, facilitators will be able to claim up to £300 a day for their time (as defined in their application) and any actual costs (as agreed in their application). The value of the day rate proposed, and the actual costs, will form part of the scoring and assessment. Case officers will assess if the day rate is reasonable for the facilitator's expertise and the proposed activities.

Environmental Co-operation Action Fund contracts will be of variable length. They will have a minimum duration of two calendar years and a maximum of five calendar years.

The Environmental Co-operation Action Fund cannot be used to fund the environmental work that is the outcome of the facilitation activity.

The facilitator should produce holding-scale plans detailing the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme / Forestry Grant Scheme options, or other funding details, required to support the Environmental Co-operation Action Fund priority.

The land manager (or their appointed agent) may then use this to prepare their own Agri-Environment Climate Scheme / Forestry Grant Scheme application, adding other options as desired and completing other relevant information, such as the Farm Environment Assessment. Funding for this is available separately and, as such, cannot form part of the Environmental Co-operation Action Fund project.

Facilitators will be expected to recruit members to the co-operative group. A template to enable land holders and managers to express an interest in being involved in the project is available below.

Expression of interest template (MS Word, Size: 132.2 kB)
doc_external_url: https://www.ruralpaymentsandservices.org/media/resources/ECAF-expression-of-interest-template2.docx

The expression of interest form is not intended to tie land managers into subsequent funding applications; it is only to show their interest in doing so.

Provision of signed forms at the point of application is not essential, though it may help when it comes to scoring the feasibility of your project.

Once a project starts, you must provide signed forms to verify claims for time spent securing participation and / or as part of your annual report to demonstrate progress.

An annual report will be required for each year of the Environmental Co-operation Action Fund project. The format of this is to be published shortly but will provide an overview of progress and explanations for any variation from the agreed plan.

Eligibility

The facilitation project must:

- be carried out on a minimum of two adjoining or nearby holdings
- address one of the specific Environmental Co-operation Action Fund priorities, and for the Habitat and Degraded Ecosystem Restoration priority or the Conservation of Vulnerable Priority Species priority address one or more of the specified habitats or species
- be located within the geographically targeted areas for the proposed Agri-Climate Environment Scheme / Forestry Grant Scheme options (or have an endorsement from the relevant agency) or be eligible for an alternative source of public funding at the time of application
- propose to undertake facilitated co-operative action that is in addition to that currently being carried out; and that potentially would lead to environmental work on the ground which is in addition to that currently undertaken by an existing group
- be of an appropriate minimum spatial scale for the environmental work being proposed
- Environmental Co-operation Action Fund support is only available where the land where the environmental work is planned is in a rural area, which is defined as land other than settlements with a population of over 3000 people (details can be found in the Scottish Government Urban Rural Classification 2013–2014), or is eligible for Agri-Climate Environment Scheme or Forestry Grant Scheme funding

How to apply

The Environmental Co-operation Action Fund application form is designed to be completed electronically and should be emailed to ECAFBusinessSupportMailbox@gov.scot with any supporting documentation.

Application form

The application window is from 6 October, 2015 to 15 January, 2016, with subsequent application windows in 2016 and 2017.

To apply, you need to register with Rural Payments and Services and receive a Business Reference Number (BRN). The Rural Payments and Inspections Division are not able to pay any funding awarded if there is no Business Reference Number.

Please read the full guidance on the website before completing the form – in particular you must be familiar with the requirements of your chosen Environmental Co-operation Action Fund priority.

You may provide supporting documents to substantiate any part of your application. Please refer to these in the answers to the application questions and use Part 6 of the application form to list the documents.

Case officers from Forestry Commission Scotland, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage will assess applications and score them accordingly.

There will be no partial approval process, or interaction between case officers and applicants during the assessment and scoring phase in 2015. We encourage you to discuss any concerns you have with your application before submission by contacting ECAFBusinessSupportMailbox@gov.scot.

Application content

Applications must be for a single Environmental Co-operation Action Fund priority. It is recognised that projects may address more than one priority, but you must decide which one is the focus and apply to that.

Each priority has a separate budget, so applications will be assessed on a like-for-like basis. Please note that case officers can determine that an application is focused on a different priority from the one applied for.

The application form is divided into eight parts.

- Part 1: Applicant details
- Part 2: Initial eligibility
- Part 3: Facilitator knowledge and experience
- Part 4: Project details
- Part 5: Financial information
- Part 6: Supporting information
- Part 7: Data disclosure
- Part 8: Declaration (to be signed by all applicants)

Parts 1 to 6 and 8 must be completed by the applicant. Part 7 is for information only.

Application form

Part 1: Applicant details

To apply, you must be registered with the Rural Payments and Inspections Division and have a Business Reference Number.

Business registration

You may complete the application form as:

- an individual, self-appointed facilitator who has identified the need for a landscape-scale environmental project and intends to develop and deliver collaborative action with relevant land holdings and key stakeholders

or

- an organisation that wishes to appoint a named facilitator. If applying through this route you must be one of the following:

1. a public sector organisation
2. a private sector organisation
3. a constituted not-for-profit organisation

4. a constituted group

Complete the relevant question and provide a brief description of the group or organisation and your role within it, if applicable.

Part 2: Initial eligibility

[2.1] Does it cover two or more holdings?

Your project should include a minimum of two adjoining or nearby holdings.

[2.2] Does the proposed project address one of the Environmental Co-operation Action Fund priorities?

Your proposed project must address one of the priorities. It may address more than one, but must be clear which priority is the focus.

[2.4] Is it in a target area?

The activities you propose land managers will potentially undertake to meet your chosen priority must, at the time of your Environmental Co-operation Action Fund application, be eligible for Agri-Environment Climate Scheme and / or Forestry Grant Scheme funding, or have an endorsement, or have an alternative source of public funding.

This means your proposed Agri-Environment Climate Scheme or Forestry Grant Scheme options must be available in the area your project covers.

Check the priority-specific guidance for suggested options and the targeting maps available for each option. You can also use the search functionality to check individual holdings.

If your project is not within the targeted areas you may be able to gain the relevant endorsements from Forestry Commission Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage or the Scottish Environment Protection Agency. You must supply the endorsement with your application.

If the environmental activities that you propose land managers will potentially undertake to meet your chosen priority are to be funded by an alternative source of public funding (such as the Water Environment Fund) please provide further details in Part 4 of the application form.

Where the project aims to undertake strategic deer management planning, particularly of roe deer, in the lowlands, there is no requirement to be in a target area for public funding, but you should use Part 4 of the application form to explain how the environmental work will be funded.

[2.5 and 2.6] Is this new and additional work?

If there is a group, or groups, undertaking collaborative facilitation or environmental work in the area your project covers, describe them here. You should include a description of the facilitation or environmental work they are currently undertaking.

The Environmental Co-operation Action Fund cannot fund activity that is already being undertaken or would go ahead without Environmental Co-operation Action Fund funding.

Please provide an explanation of how your proposed project is new and additional to the work of the existing groups, or groups, in Part 3 of the application form.

If the project does not meet all the eligibility criteria the application will not proceed.

Part 3: Facilitator knowledge and experience

If applying as the facilitator, please fill in each section.

You should refer to the relevant priority guidance for the desired specialised expertise. Evidence for this should be provided in addition to more general skills.

You may wish to provide supporting documents for this section – see the supporting documents table for suggestions – but you can provide anything you think relevant.

If applying as an organisation and you have not yet appointed a named facilitator who will be taking forward the project, you will not be able to answer these questions. Instead, you must provide a job description and person specification for the facilitator role that you intend to appoint.

In this situation, the application will automatically receive the minimum assessment score for the various aspects of the facilitator's knowledge and expertise, as this will not be known at the point of application. If successful, the award would be approved in principle, subject to the employment of a suitable individual.

Part 4: Project details

[4.1] Describe the location of your project. You must also provide a map showing the location and scale of the project. Refer to the mapping requirements guidance and the specific priority guidance for any additional requirements and any other details necessary for the case officer to understand and score the proposal.

[4.2] Enter the proposed start date and completion date for when you plan to undertake facilitated collaboration activities. This will also need to be set out in the Costs and Activities table. You should bear in mind the timescale for the issue of contracts. For 2015 applications, contracts will be issued during May and June 2016. The minimum length of a contract is two calendar years, with a maximum length of five calendar years.

[4.3] The project description should contain the bulk of the information on your proposal. You should consider including:

- the number, type and scale of holdings
- the drivers and priorities of the project, and the opportunities and threats
- an overview of your planned approach (in conjunction with the Costs and Activities table). How do your proposed activities fit with the scale and nature of the project?
- details of the funding you intend land managers to use, including the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme and / or Forestry Grant Scheme options that will meet the environmental objectives
- an explanation of any use of sub-contracted expertise required, such as consultants to carry out surveys
- any costs necessary to the project that are not eligible for Environmental Co-operation Action Fund funding
- your proposals for monitoring and evaluation, demonstrating best practice in the sharing of results and good practice
- any further information required as described in the Environmental Co-operation Fund priority guidance

You may wish to reference and attach any supporting documents necessary to substantiate your statements. Please see the guidance on supporting documents and refer to these documents in Part 6 of the application form.

[4.7] Your project should be of an appropriate minimum spatial scale for the Environmental Co-operation Action Fund priority selected.

A map showing the location and scale of the project should be submitted with the application.

Refer to the mapping requirements guidance and the specific priority guidance for what the map must contain.

Part 5: Financial information

This part should be completed with the Costs and Activities form for each year of the project.

The scheme will pay the facilitator a daily rate for the services supplied. This daily rate is variable with an upper limit of £300 per day. Further details of the eligible services can be found in the Costs and Activities table and the eligible costs and verification tables.

Where facilitation organisations are applying for the scheme, any full cost recovery should be included as part of the facilitation day rate, which is capped £300 per day.

[5.1] If Environmental Co-operation Action Fund funding is not essential for this project to take place, you may not be eligible for funding.

[5.2] The work activities and descriptions in the table are generic to all Environmental Co-operation Action Fund priorities – please also see the individual priority guidance for detail of activities specific to your chosen priority.

The eligible costs and verification tables should also be used – it guides you on what you can and can't apply for as well as describing the evidence we will expect to see when you make a claim.

You should fill in a separate table for each calendar year of your project (a minimum of two years and a maximum of five).

The table is designed to help you describe your planned activities. There is no requirement to complete a section if it is not appropriate. All activities and items you intend to claim should be shown in this table; it will form your contract and you will only be able to claim what is described in this table. If you vary from this table, you will have to apply for a variation and if you do not deliver the activities on this table, you may be in breach of contract with appropriate penalties.

The activities and associated number of days should be broken down as much as possible.

You will be required to provide evidence to support the days you claim – see the eligible costs and verification tables and guidance on quotes and estimates.

If you are applying for the Deer Management priority you will need to detail 100 per cent of the eligible costs of the project and claim all these costs as described in the claims guidance. We will pay you 50 per cent of the eligible claims.

Part 6: Supporting information

Please use this section to reference any supporting documents you are providing with your application. These should be provided electronically with the application form.

If this is not possible, for example with a large map, the paper copy can be posted to or handed in to your local Rural Payments and Inspections Division area office.

A template detailing some of the documentation that must be submitted with the application form will be available on the website.

Failure to submit all supporting documents referenced will result in your application not proceeding.

Part 7: Data disclosure

This section is for information only and details the Rural Payments and Inspections Division's policy on data disclosure.

Part 8: Declaration

The declaration needs to be signed by all applicants, whether a facilitator or a representative of a group or organisation (who may not have yet appointed a facilitator).

If signing on behalf of a group or organisation, the position of the signatory is required.

Supporting documentation

The following is a guide to the kind of supporting documents you may wish to submit with your application.

Please read the Environmental Co-operation Action Fund priority-specific guidance for further details on what is required for each priority.

For all priorities, additional supporting documents may be required to provide evidence in support of statements or add depth to your proposal.

Mandatory documentation
Map(s) of the area that the Environmental Co-operation Action Fund project will cover. See the mapping guidance and individual Environmental Co-operation Action Fund priorities for the specific content required

Endorsement from the relevant environmental agency if the project is outwith the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme / Forestry Grant Scheme targeted areas, or evidence of eligibility for alternative public funding
Evidence that the proposed work is new and additional to any environmental work being undertaken in the project area
Refer to the 'Application requirements' section within each piece of priority-specific guidance
Desirable documentation
Evidence to support scoring criteria
Confirmation of any work being undertaken, by other groups, within the project area
Facilitator’s knowledge and experience
Proposed person specification and job description for employing a facilitator (if an organisation is applying in advance)
CV, professional accreditation and relevant qualifications
Reports and outputs from previous projects detailing facilitation, project management and environmental outcomes
Case studies from previous projects detailing facilitation, project management and environmental outcomes
Outcome-based evidence from previous projects detailing facilitation, project management and environmental outcomes
Financial information
Justification of day rate
Project budget
Details of any additional funding being sought (outwith Environmental Co-operation Action Fund / Agri-Environment Climate Scheme / Forestry Grant Scheme funding)

Mapping requirements

Your mapping should be produced on an up-to-date Ordnance Survey map background, at the largest available scale that is clearly legible. For many projects 1:50,000 will be appropriate, though for the largest (e.g. extensive upland deer management) this may not be legible and a smaller-scale background will be required. For smaller projects the larger scales of 1:25,000 or even 1:10,000 may be legible.

Your mapping must:

- show the boundary of the overall project area
- indicate the area of land holdings targeted for facilitation. If this is identical to the overall project area, i.e. there are no 'gaps', this must be stated in writing within the mapping. If it is almost the same, map the boundary of areas not targeted, i.e. map the 'gaps'. Otherwise, map the area targeted, in a way that is distinguishable from the overall project area
- state the Ordnance Survey grid reference of the centre of your project area
- show your Business Reference Number and case title
- not have any project boundary detail hidden by folds, labels or marks
- be marked clearly and accurately, and be consistent with the details in your application

Please see the specific Environmental Co-operation Action Fund priority guidance for additional mapping requirements specific to your main priority.

You must use originals or good quality copies (i.e. paper maps), unless you have access to a geographic information system (GIS) or digital mapping software that enables you to submit maps electronically to the required standard.

Access to maps and copyright

If you are producing maps from your own geographic information system or digital mapping software, you should make sure that plots are based on up-to-date Ordnance Survey MasterMap data or 1:10,000 scale raster data.

Large-scale mapping covering the whole of Scotland is available from Ordnance Survey in various hard-copy and digital formats under the product titles OS Sitemap or OS Landplan. These products allow you to define your needs. Maps can be produced site-centred regardless of National Grid sheet edges and at any size between A4 and AO.

Ordnance Survey

Any organisation or person wanting to copy Ordnance Survey based maps for their own business or private use must either be licensed by the Ordnance Survey or apply for permission each time a copy is required and keep to the terms of that permission. It is your responsibility to ensure that any copyright responsibilities are met.

The Ordnance Survey provides licences to many bodies (for example, local authorities, various professional organisations and business firms) and to individual customers who have a regular need to copy Ordnance Survey material.

To apply for a licence or for further information contact Ordnance Survey Customer Information on 08456 05 05 05.

Costs and activities table

These two examples of costs and activities tables are a guide to the level of detail that is expected to be completed when applying for funding.

Example one of a completed costs and activities table (PDF, Size: 1.4 MB)
doc_external_url: https://www.ruralpaymentsandservices.org/media/resources/ECAF-costs-and-activities-template---medium-sized-invasive-plant-control-project-Phase-1.pdf

Example two of a completed costs and activities table (PDF, Size: 1.4 MB)
doc_external_url: https://www.ruralpaymentsandservices.org/media/resources/ECAF-Costs-and-activities-table--Phase--2.pdf

One costs and activities table is required for each year of your proposed project, showing what activities you intend to undertake in each year of your project.

The eligible costs and verification table below gives examples of the types of costs and activities that are eligible and the verification information you will need to provide to support your claim.

The costs and activities tables submitted with your application will form the basis of any contract awarded to you.

Eligible costs and verification

The costs and activities table in your application form, which will form the basis of any contract awarded, should draw on the activities named below. They demonstrate the types of costs and activities that are eligible and the verification information you will need to provide to support your claim. This table must be read together with the Environmental Co-operation Action Fund priority-specific guidance, which provides further detail of the anticipated activities.

This table is not intended to be a project plan. Applications may assign little or no time to some activity groups, provided adequate justification is provided (e.g. 'no need for evidence gathering as this already done under project xxx'). The order in which the activities are presented is indicative but not mandatory.

Activities that are not covered below may, in certain circumstances, be eligible provided you give full justification. The verification of any unusual costs or activities that are not covered by this table, or the one in your Environmental Co-operation Action Fund priority, will be discussed with you before award of a contract.

If you have any doubts please contact ECAFBusinessSupportMailbox@gov.scot for confirmation of eligibility.

If you are VAT registered you may only claim assistance for any costs net of VAT. If you are not VAT registered, you can claim assistance for any costs inclusive of VAT. If you submit a claim with VAT costs included, you must submit proof of your VAT registration from HMRC.

Where you intend to claim actual costs or you have activity that will be fulfilled by a third party you must provide a quote with the application. See the Quotes and estimates section for more information.

The activities are split into phase 1, expected to be prior to participants applying for further funding to carry out the environmental work on the ground, and phase 2, expected to be after participants have this further funding in place. These two phases may overlap and some activities may fall in either phase.

Phase 1 activities			
Activity	**Description**	**Verification – time**	**Verification – costs**
Raising awareness of public and stakeholders	Using local media, posters, mail, door knocking, public meetings etc to raise awareness of project aims	Signatures of at least two attendees (signature, name, date, event)	Receipted invoices – see Claims section
Identifying potential land-manager participants	Initial contact with owners and occupiers, land registry search where necessary, resolving issues of ownership, tenancy and eligibility	Detail of holdings visited and outcome (name, address, date) (not home, appointment made, discussion took place)	Receipted invoices – see Claims section
Securing participation	Meetings / correspondence agreeing costs, commitments and risks; negotiating compromise Involving / informing participants on progress, which may include establishing and managing a steering group	Detail of holdings visited and outcome (name, address, date) (not home, appointment made, discussion took place) Signed expression of interest forms	Receipted invoices – see Claims section
Evidence gathering	Site visits, surveys and desk-based research to map the environment, issues and agency interests (e.g. designated sites) appropriate to the project	Copies of surveys done and maps created Species and habitat data recorded on the Biodiversity Action Reporting System and the National Biodiversity Network Detail of holdings visited (name, address, date)	Receipted invoices – see Claims section
Strategic management plan	The plan should identify, design and justify the environmental / management work needed; when the work will be carried out; the resources required; and appropriate monitoring Preparation of draft plan; consulting participants on draft; preparation of final plan	Copy of strategic management plan	Receipted invoices – see Claims section
Individual holding-scale plans	Plans should identify the required works and their fit with proposed funding sources (e.g. Agri-Environment Climate Scheme options and capital items). Any work preparing Farm Environmental Assessments that would inform Agri-Environment Climate Scheme applications is not eligible as these attract Agri-Environment Climate Scheme payment Drafting; consulting land manager; finalising	Detail of plans created (name and address of holding, date)	Receipted invoices – see Claims section
Consulting agencies and / or applying for consents needed	Consulting the Scottish Environment Protection Agency / Scottish Natural Heritage / Forestry Commission Scotland or others as appropriate e.g. Controlled Activities Regulations licensing, herbicide-near-water approval, designated sites, protected species	Copies of correspondence and / or consents	Receipted invoices – see Claims section

Preparing and submitting relevant funding applications	Translating holding-scale plans into applications: only those that don't attract Agri-Environment Climate Scheme payment (e.g. Water Environment Fund)	Application(s) as submitted	Receipted invoices – see Claims section

Phase 2 activities			
Activity	**Description**	**Verification – time**	**Verification – costs**
Overseeing project delivery	If holdings are successful in securing Agri-Environment Climate Scheme / Forestry Grant Scheme contracts (or other funding), the beneficiaries of those contracts will be responsible for their implementation However, the Environmental Co-operation Action Fund facilitator has a role to play in terms of overseeing the project implementation: co-ordinating work, identifying opportunities for economies of scale with contract delivery, agreeing phasing of work, tender preparation, issue, review and award Supervising (and possibly recruiting) staff / contractors / participants undertaking multi-landholding work Further meetings, e.g. steering group or to otherwise mediate between land managers Administration of payments and accounts in relation to collaborative action	Signatures of staff / contractors (signature, name, date, event)	Receipted invoices – see Claims section
Promotion and securing additional participation	Demonstrating techniques and sharing good practice (e.g. through events), training, etc Use of media to attract new members Possible final event to discuss future management etc	Signatures of at least three attendee (signature, name, date, event)	Receipted invoices – see Claims section
Equipment	Equipment essential for facilitation of collaboration and demonstrably additional to ongoing needs / use Equipment required for environmental / management works is NOT eligible	Detail of use of equipment (date, holding if relevant)	Receipted invoices – see Claims section
Strategic management	Reviewing progress, including repeat surveys where required, and if necessary adapting management, i.e. through revising the landscape-scale strategic management plan	Report of changes made	Receipted invoices – see Claims section

Ineligible costs:

- developing and preparing Agri-Environment Climate Scheme applications and / or Farm Environment Assessments, or Forestry Grant Scheme applications, is not eligible. (Funding for Farm Environment Assessments is available through the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme)
- costs for any environmental work already being undertaken by an existing group within the project area applied for

- only equipment critical for the success of the project will be eligible. Office equipment is included in the day rate
- website and social media that are not new or Environmental Co-operation Action Fund project specific
- managing volunteers to carry out the environmental work should not form part of the Environmental Co-operation Action Fund application

Quotes and estimates

Where actual costs are below £1000 you must provide a single quote with your application. Supplier price lists and price lists drawn from the internet are acceptable in pricing individual items valued at less than £1000.

- quotes are in written / printed form and clearly originated from a reputable supplier who can deliver the items or work
- supplier's contact / business details are clear and legitimate
- quote is based on what is described in the application
- no missing elements
- no ineligible elements
- cost calculations are up-to-date, correct and precise
- suppliers should confirm for how long the quote is valid
- quotes should indicate whether the price includes the appropriate VAT rate; this is to determine the correct level of grant award. For example, a community group or not-for-profit organisation may be VAT registered and be either zero-rated or partially exempt from VAT

If the application is approved, funding will be based on the quote received. You can proceed with a more expensive quote if you wish, but must be willing to fund the difference yourself. In all circumstances, whether quotes or estimates are submitted for approval, funds awarded will not be in excess of the total cost calculation supplied.

Where actual costs are over £1000, or you have activity that will be fulfilled by a third party, these should be accompanied by two quotes at the time of application.

What happens next

Applications will be forwarded to specialist case officers in Forestry Commission Scotland, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency or Scottish Natural Heritage to establish eligibility. Applications that are successful at this stage will progress to assessment and scoring by the specialist case officer.

After assessment and scoring, the application and the recommended decision will be forwarded to the National Proposal Assessment Committee for ratification. Following the committee's decision, letters will be issued with contract offers, where applicable.

Work should only start when the contract offer has been accepted and that acceptance has been acknowledged by the Rural Payments and Inspection Division.

You can appeal a decision to refuse funding. Details will be provided on your decision letter.

Scoring criteria

Scoring criteria will be used to identify good quality applications that are likely to be effective in delivering one of the Environmental Co-operation Action Fund priorities and represent value for money. The scoring system will contain some generic criteria applicable to all priorities, as well as priority-specific criteria.

The following questions outline the areas each application will be scored on:

- to what extent does the project have the potential to make a significant contribution to the Environmental Co-operation Action Fund priority; see the priority-specific guidance for additional information
- to what extent are the proposed facilitation methods and activities likely to generate effective co-operative action
- to what extent is the proposed project feasible
- to what extent is the project new or expanded co-operation or environmental activity for the area and priority

- to what extent do the environmental outcomes of the project have a good fit with Agri-Environment Climate Scheme / Forestry Grant Scheme options or the alternative source(s) of public funding being proposed at the point of the Environmental Co-operation Action Fund application
- facilitator knowledge and experience of co-operative processes
- facilitator knowledge and experience of project management and delivery
- facilitator knowledge and experience of the main Environmental Co-operation Fund priority being addressed
- to what extent are the costs appropriate (eligible, suitable and relevant)
- to what extent are the costs reasonable (fair and sensible)
- to what extent does the proposed project demonstrate best practice in both the sharing of results and of good practice

The application form guides you where to provide evidence for each of these aspects, through answering questions or stating project costs. You may provide supporting documents to help demonstrate the strength of your project in these areas.

Monitoring and recording species and habitat data

Species data

Organisations that are already registered as data contributors to the National Biodiversity Network Gateway should submit their species records via the normal route.

Those organisations that are not registered as data contributors to the National Biodiversity Network should submit their species records either via:

- iRecord
- or through their local record centre

Both these approaches provide verification and quality assurance procedures before the data is uploaded to the National Biodiversity Network Gateway.

Submission of Environmental Co-operation Action Fund species records must be made prior to claim submission.

Habitat data

All habitat data should be recorded through the Biodiversity Action Reporting System using BAP Priority Habitat classification. Further guidance and training opportunities will be provided. Submission of Environmental Co-operation Action Fund habitat records must be made prior to claim submission.

Invasive plant species

Records of invasive plants should be submitted via:

- the PlantTracker website or mobile app
- the Rivers and Fisheries Trusts of Scotland INNS database

These methods have the advantage of being able to record when particular stands of invasive plants have been treated and ‘records of absence’, where sites have been surveyed and no invasive plants have been observed.

Records of absence should be submitted for stands of invasive plants where no re-growth has been observed for at least two consecutive growing seasons.

State aid

Any advice or support that is attributed to non-farmers (i.e. those not involved in primary production) is to be paid via de minimis, under EC regulation No 1407/2013 (de minimis aid regulation).

There is a ceiling of €200,000 for all de minimis aid provided to any one firm over a three-year period.

Therefore, a nominated facilitator undertaking an environmental project will have to ascertain how many of the participants are not involved with primary agriculture or forestry and ask them to confirm that they are not in breach of their personal (industrial) de minimis threshold of €200,000 within the current and previous two fiscal years.

The facilitator must ensure when participants sign up, before or during the facilitation process, that they agree in principle to be involved. They must declare the level of de minimis funding the business has previously received.

During the period of the contract the facilitator will have to determine how much aid has been attributed to these individuals, in order that a scheme letter can be issued to those non-farmers detailing the de minimis arrangements.

Please note that a full state aid notification to cover woodland projects has been submitted to the European Commission that will ensure forestry projects comply with state aid rules. We expect full validation shortly. The de minimis aid rule will therefore not apply to woodland owners.

Contracts

Environmental Co-operation Action Fund contracts will be of variable length. They will have a minimum duration of two calendar years and a maximum of five calendar years.

Each contract will require you to undertake the activities proposed in your application, in return for payment of the costs associated with each activity, as set out in the application.

Requests for variations may be submitted where it is necessary to amend the schedule of activities, in duly justified cases.

Claims

To receive payments, you can submit a claim form on a quarterly basis providing evidence in support of every item claimed (such as receipted invoices and bank statements) that the expenditure outlined in your contract has been incurred. You must also submit timesheets detailing your time spent on each item.

The original invoices must provide the following details:

- supplier's name and address, and VAT registration number if appropriate
- your name and address as claimant
- description of services provided or goods supplied, separately costed
- date on which the services or goods were supplied
- total amount due for payment with the VAT element clearly detailed
- date paid
- method of payment used

In addition, when you supply a fully receipted original invoice, you must also back it up with other evidence of payment such as:

- the original cleared cheque
- the original bank or credit card statement
- the original bank giro credit slip
- an accountant's report
- a certified extract from your business account

When you are submitting a timesheet, you must give the following information:

- date the work was carried out
- the hours worked
- the type of work involved

If you are VAT registered, you may only claim assistance for any costs net of VAT. If you are not VAT registered, you can claim assistance for any costs inclusive of VAT. If you submit a claim with VAT costs included, you must submit proof of your VAT registration from HMRC.

You will also need to provide a short annual report, which draws on your quarterly claims, identifying what is being done differently and the difference this is having on the ground. At least two members of your group of landowners will need to sign-off the report to confirm its contents.

Payment

Payment will only be made once all administrative checks have been carried out on the claim to ensure that the work claimed is suitable, matches what is on your contract and that the claim has been completed correctly.

If your claim has been selected for inspection, your claim will only be paid once the inspection has been carried out and the inspection result is satisfactory.

You will receive payment by BACS into your nominated bank account. All payments will be made in sterling. We aim to have your payment into your bank account within 10 days from the date we authorise the claim.

If you change your bank account you must inform us as soon as possible by completing the PF03 Register your bank details – sterling form.

Inspections

We are required to inspect at least five per cent of projects annually.

Inspections

If your project is selected for inspection, you will need to provide us with evidence of your project's compliance in the following areas:

- any change in circumstances that affect your eligibility criteria
- the work on fostering co-operation within the group
- what the group is doing differently as a result of facilitation and the difference this is making to the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme priorities outlined in your contract
- the work to support members of the group to apply for individual but complementary Agri-Environment Climate Scheme agreements
- compliance with the facilitation agreement

You will also need to provide evidence of any sessions you have had with the project participants, including:

- length of the session
- dates
- issues covered
- time spent on preparation
- details of your costs
- signed and dated statement from at least three participants if a group session, and the individual if a one-to-one meeting, confirming the date that each session took place and details of the value to them in fostering co-operation

If you are providing training, you will need to provide evidence that this has been provided:

- length of the session
- dates
- names of the participants who received the training
- subjects covered
- feedback from at least three participants if a group session, and the individual if one-to-one training, on the value of it to them

You must also provide evidence of the amount of time spent helping participants to interpret Agri-Environment Climate Scheme guidance so that individual, but complementary, Agri-Environment Climate Scheme applications can be submitted by participants.

Each participant receiving this support must sign and date to confirm that you have provided this guidance and that your time spent advising and assisting with the applications was not spent completing the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme application on their behalf.

You must keep all necessary records relevant to your grant for seven years after the agreement has ended as they may be required for inspections either before or after payment.

Breaches and penalties

If you do not follow the contract terms and conditions we will call this a breach.

A breach may be detected through the checking of your application and claim, through an inspection or following a check of the documentation relating to a claim.

If you terminate your contract this will also be considered as a breach.

Each case will be assessed on its individual merits and facts.

Capital items that you may claim, such as reimbursement for publicity materials or hiring a hall, are covered by Article 63 of Commission Regulation (EU) 809/2014.

Under Article 63, once we receive your claim we will establish:

(a) the amount that you are due based on what you have claimed, and

(b) what you are due after an examination of the eligibility of the expenditure of your claim and supporting documentation.

A breach may result in your grant award being reduced, reclaimed with interest, or withdrawn.

Appeals and complaints

If you receive a decision to refuse, recover or reduce your payment you may appeal this decision under the European Commission's Rural Payments Appeal procedures.

If you are unhappy with our service as a whole, we have a dedicated complaints procedure to help you resolve this.

More information can be found in the following sections:

Appeals

Complaints

Publicity

As part of any successful application, you will be required to inform the public about the support you receive. How you do this depends on how much you receive.

For funding of any amount, you must place a short description about the project on any related websites, where a link between the purpose of the website and the support provided to the project can be established, and highlight the financial support received.

If you receive funding in excess of €10,000 you are required to publicise the funding. We will provide you with an A3 poster that can be used to inform the public about the aim of the facilitation funding and its financial support from the European Union. This poster must be displayed at a location that is visible to the public at one of the holdings.

For funding of more than €50,000, you must put up an explanatory plaque with information about your project and highlight the financial support you receive.

All plaques must include:

- the European emblem in accordance with the standards detailed in EU Commission Regulation 808/2014 Annex III Part 2
- the statement 'The European Agriculture Fund for Rural Development: Europe investing in rural areas'
- a description of the project which shall take up at least 25 per cent of the plaque

The emblem should be as per the standards presented on the European Union website.

If you fail to erect a plaque we may seek the recovery of payments made to you for the project in question.

Examples of suitable wording for plaques:

The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development:
Europe investing in Rural Areas

Providing moorland management for livestock and deer,
and seed and crops for farmland birds

Recent changes

Section	Change	Previous text	New text
What will the facilitators do?	'Land owners' amended to 'land holders'.	Facilitators will be expected to recruit members to the co-operative group. A template to enable land owners and managers to express an interest in being involved in the project is available below.	Facilitators will be expected to recruit members to the co-operative group. A template to enable land holders and managers to express an interest in being involved in the project is available below.
Costs and activities table	New section.	-	These two examples of costs and activities tables are a guide to the level of detail that is expected to be completed when applying for funding. Example one of a completed costs and activities table (PDF, Size: 1.4 MB) Example two of a completed costs and activities table (PDF, Size: 1.4 MB) One costs and activities table is required for each year of your proposed project, showing what activities you intend to undertake in each year of your project. The eligible costs and verification table below gives examples of the types of costs and activities that are eligible and the verification information you will need to provide to support your claim. The costs and activities tables submitted with your application will form the basis of any contract awarded to you.

Previous guidance

Previous versions of this page

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