

# Summary of outcomes 21<sup>st</sup> NRN Meeting



6-7 May, 2014  
Kendal, England

## Presentations

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## Field visit presentations (06.05.2014)

- **Welcome to the Cumbria and the Northwest** - *David Hunter*

- **Northwest Livestock Programme 2009-2013** – *Louise Maguire*

The Northwest Livestock Programme ran from 2009 to 2013, supported through the Rural Development Programme of England (RDPE). It was designed to improve the competitiveness of livestock farms in the North West through a range of measures including on-farm planning, knowledge transfer and small capital grants.

- **Livestock monitor farms and networks** – *Kath Lowe – & Ben Hartley (Dairy farmer)*

Monitor farms were supported in the framework of the RDPE Northwest Livestock Programme. The initiative was managed by Myerscough College and supported monitor farms (6 in total), farmer groups and demonstration events (302 farmer groups meetings and 105 demonstration events). Monitor farms (that are selected by farmers) have to develop a business improvement plan and key performance indicators. Ben Hartley (a young dairy farmer) talked about his own experience as the owner of one of the monitor farms. Main benefits brought included learning from peers and having access to a large network of knowledge, increased attention to detail and monitoring performance and overall improvements on the farm (such as increased milk yield and reduced feed costs).

- **The Woodlands Advisory Service** – *Neville Elstone*

For 21 years Cumbria Woodlands has been advising woodland owners on how to improve and increase sustainable woodland management, as well as increasing the amount of new woodland in targeted locations. It is often presumed that woods are wild places that can look after themselves. But this is rarely the case in the UK, and in fact many benefit greatly from active management, which can bring additional social, environmental and economic benefits. The Woodland Advisory Service (WAS) was a three-year programme for woodland owners supported by qualified advisers. Available to any owner of unmanaged woodland of half a hectare or more in Cumbria, it was designed to increase the area of woodland under active management throughout the county and raise awareness of the potential of woodlands. In total, 439 woodland owners received advisory support.

- **Cumbria Woodlands: impact on businesses and area development** – *Kerry Cooper*

After struggling to find high quality, locally grown woodchip to heat her domestic boiler, Kerry Cooper decided the best idea would be to produce her own. With the

help of Cumbria Woodlands, Kerry set up Lakes Biomass, a business with ambitious plans to help develop a supply chain of local wood production (woodchip, kindling, log and pellets). Today, Lakes Biomass employs a team of eight – four men and four women – and has recently bought a new lorry and blowing unit to deliver wood fuel more quickly, quietly and efficiently. Supported by courses and grant applications managed by Cumbria Woodlands, the business has benefited from around £250,000 in capital grants from the LEADER programme. *“Almost as important as the financial support and advice has been the mentoring offered both informally and at courses run by the Cumbria Wood Fuel School.”* – says Kerry Cooper.

[Meeting agenda](#)

[Meeting Photo Album](#)

## Meeting introduction

David Wilford, from the Rural Communities Policy Unit within the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), welcomed all participants to Kendal. The 21<sup>st</sup> NRN meeting represented the final NRN meeting organised by the ENRD during 2007-2013 for NRNs, and as such it was also a “celebration” of the work of NSUs and NRNs during the 2007-2013 programming period. Its focus was on the topic of “Understanding NRN evaluation and self-assessment” with the aim of supporting NRNs (and NSUs in particular) in managing and carrying out self-assessment and contributing to the RDP/NRN evaluation efficiently.

Participants were invited to write a “legacy letter” to their network with suggestions/recommendations for future activities. DG AGRI will make sure that the letters are delivered to the addressee network at the first NRN meeting of the 2014-2020 period.

## Session I: ‘Retrospective’ on the national and European networks during 2007-2013

### **The Added Value of Networking: Achievements of national and regional rural networks during the 2007-2013 programming period**

The main objective of the session were to “look back” at the achievements of national and regional networks during the 2007-2013 programming period, and learn lessons for the future. Presentations were made by representatives of NSUs of national and regional networks and a representative of local stakeholders (LAG), including the results and reflections from evaluation, self-assessment and other national network assessment exercises.

### **Adrian Banford, Cumbria Dales and Fells LAG (UK-England)**

The opening presentation from Cumbria LAG Manager aimed to convey what the key expectations of LAGs (as key stakeholders of NRNs) are, and stated that *“NRN should be able to offer expertise, knowledge and best practices”*. In Mr. Bandford’s view, LAGs need to have access to relevant expertise and information,

including experience from other EU countries. In many cases accesses to good practices is hindered by language and the NSU services are needed to bridge linguistic and sometimes cultural differences. It was highlighted that it is also important **how information is communicated** to ensure that messages are clear and remembered while also ensuring effective stakeholders' engagement. NRNs should treat network members as "customers" and focus on the needs of these groups to effectively implement the RDP and policies.

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**Xavier Delmon**, *Wallonian RN (BE)*

The presentation highlighted **main challenges** the NSU identified during the 2007-2013 programming period including: (i) the existence of diverse and sometimes divergent interests of stakeholders; (ii) the need to create and differentiate the NRN as a specific platform for exchange; (iii) the need to create awareness and willingness on the Managing Authority level to include issues, themes and stakeholders in the NRN that are not necessarily linked to the RDP measures; (iv) to 'translate' the technical language in effective messages. According to the **self-assessment** conducted by the Wallonian RN, the network allowed for more integration of various sectors relevant for RDP implementation, and effectively engaged stakeholders and decision-makers in consultation processes. The assessment showed an increased participation of stakeholders who were not reached before.

Based on the experience of 2007-2013 the representative of the Wallonia NSU indicated that the **key areas where ENRD could contribute** to the future NRN work are (i) analysis and effective communication of what EU policies are and what they mean for the national stakeholders, (ii) provision of training and capacity building, (iii) offering a safe environment to share common concerns.

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**Mariam Sánchez Guisández**, *Spanish NRN (ES)*

The presentation reflected experience from working with 17 regional RDPs and focused mainly on the key challenges and how the NRN plans to address those in the 2014-2020 period. Visibility, relevance and communication, which were seen as main difficulties for the 2007-2013 period, will be addressed in the future through the development of a comprehensive communication plan to engage more effectively the key stakeholder groups such as LAGs. The Spanish NRN representative indicated that it would be beneficial to further intensify interaction on EU level in order to offer more actively support for transnational cooperation to interested LAGs.

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**The main outcomes of ENRD Self-assessment** – *Edina Ocsko, ENRD CP*

The purpose of the presentation was to introduce the process and the outcomes of the ENRD self-assessment, with specific focus on lessons learnt about network self-assessment and rural networking in general. The first part of the presentation explained the purpose and process of the ENRD self-assessment. During the second part the findings with regard to network self-assessment were presented, including challenges such as the initial lack of intervention logic and the challenge

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of measuring the outcomes of networking. During the third part of the presentation the results with regard to the assessment of networking (and work of the ENRD with NSUs/NRNs in particular) were highlighted, including findings on the level of engagement of different NSUs and their role as multipliers. Finally, some cross-cutting findings from the self-assessment were drawn. Findings of the self-assessment learnt from ENRD self-assessment can be read at [through this link. http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app\\_templates/enrd\\_assets/pdf/nrn-toolkit/Final\\_Dissemination\\_material\\_ENRD\\_Self-evaluation\\_final\\_050514.pdf](http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/enrd_assets/pdf/nrn-toolkit/Final_Dissemination_material_ENRD_Self-evaluation_final_050514.pdf)

## Session II: Rural Networks today and tomorrow

**Setting the scene on European-level networking** – *Matthias Langemeyer, DG AGRI*

The presentation gave an overview of the relevant provisions included in the EU legislation on the governance of European-level networking.

The European Commission is currently elaborating an EC Decision to define a common governance structure for the ENRD (including the evaluation function) and the EIP-AGRI Network, in order to ensure synergies and coordination in the best possible way.

It is expected that the new structure will include:

- A larger rural networks **Assembly** meeting once a year including: MAs, PAs, NRNs, RD organisations, LAGs, Advisory services and Agricultural research bodies.
- A **smaller Steering group** meeting 3-4 times a year including representatives of MS, EU organisations, LEADER organisations, evaluators, researchers.

The Assembly will be able to set up permanent or ad-hoc thematic working groups (e.g. LEADER/CLLD, innovation).

The three network support facilities, namely the ENRD Contact Point, the EIP-AGRI Service Point, and the Evaluation Help Desk, will continue to exist ensuring support to the EU Networks' activities.

Indicatively, the new Contact Point supporting the ENRD in the period 2014-2020 should be operational by September 2014.

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**Overview of the “NRN in transition mapping exercise”** – *Elena Maccioni, ENRD CP*

The presentation provided an overview on the Member States' (MSs) decisions concerning the organisation of their Rural Networks in the 2014-2020 programming period. The data presented was a summary of the [report prepared based on the 2014 NRN Mapping survey](#) (in early 2014). Information provided by networks are provisional and may MSs' change during 2014. More specifically the

presentation provided information on:

- Whether the Member States are planning to organise their Network Support Unit (NSU) at National or at a Regional level;
- Whether the Member States are planning to organise their NSU within the MA, delegated or outsourced (Operational set-up);
- The main expected changes in the NSU's activities.

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**NRNs' networking needs: perspective of a "new" NRN – Vlatka Pavlinic, Croatian National Rural Network**

The presentation provided the perspective of a recently established NRN and illustrated the needs and challenges for a 'new' network. The Croatian National Rural Network was established in 2011, as part of the MA. The NRN's activity focuses (among others) to support LAGs (including cooperation), disseminate guidelines and supporting documents provided by the MA and the PA and organise meetings.

Currently in Croatia two other networks (the 'Croatian Rural Development Network' and the 'LEADER network') are operating in support of rural stakeholders. Hence the NRN will need to increase awareness about its specific activities and roles.

#### Discussion

After the three presentations 45 minutes were dedicated to a facilitated discussion on future networking needs, ways of networking and cooperation among networks. Some key issues discussed at group tables and shared in plenary can be found in [Annex I](#) of this report.

### Session III: Understanding NRN Evaluation and Self-assessment

The general objective of this session was to contribute to a better understanding of "formal evaluation" and "self-assessment" of networks.

#### Introductory presentations

The session started with **two presentations** in order to provide an overview of the legal requirements for NRNs with respect to monitoring and evaluation:

- **Presentation of Common Monitoring and Evaluation System legal requirements for 2014-2020** – *Christophe Derzelle, DG AGRI*
- **Feedback from the EEN good practice workshop**– *Eric Nieto, Evaluation Helpdesk*

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### Facilitated discussion about the distinction and the inter-linkages between NRN evaluation and self-assessment

Participants: *Elita Benga, Latvian State Institute of Agrarian Economics; Christophe Derzelle, DG AGRI; Maria Gustafsson, SE NRN; Agata Markuszewska, PL NRN; Carlo Ricci, Independent Evaluator; Jela Tvrdonova, Evaluation Helpdesk.*

The panel discussion aimed at providing a better understanding of the common challenges and possible synergies of network evaluation and self-assessment through the different perspectives of experts. Some of the main discussion points can be summarised as follows:

- ✓ **Main challenges for monitoring and evaluation:** Measuring the contribution and achievements of NRNs was identified as one of the main challenges of network self-assessment and evaluation. This requires a good understanding of ‘why do we need a network’, and specific NRN indicators and evaluation methods. The development of network intervention logic, and the identification and collection of relevant information and data need to start early on. The intervention logic is the basis of the operation of the network, as well as its self-assessment and evaluation. The evaluation plans will be crucial tools to clarify the details of network evaluation.
- ✓ **NRN evaluation & RDP evaluation:** Some parts of the evaluation framework (such as baseline network indicators) can be identified in close cooperation between the network and evaluators. Evaluations can help to improve the operation of networks (e.g. as in the Polish case), including the refinement of the intervention logic. NRNs need to contribute to the improved implementation of RDPs (as one of their main mandates), but can also set additional network objectives and generate additional added value (e.g. improved governance).
- ✓ **Good network indicators:** The evaluation of networking needs specific indicators (that are often qualitative). One needs to think of aspects such as social capital, level of interactions, behavioural change. The level of satisfaction of stakeholders (“happiness indicators”) and their assessment are important aspects of network evaluation.
- ✓ **Linking evaluation and self-assessment:** Links can be created between NRN evaluation and self-assessment: *“Where there is a good self-assessment the evaluator can also work better”*. NRNs are knowledge agents and should be used to inform the evaluation process. Stakeholders need to be involved in the process: for instance in Sweden, a consultation on the intervention logic was carried out, and a stakeholder survey on

‘how they participate in the network’ was conducted.

## Session IV: Recent and upcoming activities for NRNs

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**Results/outcomes of the NRN peer-to-peer training “Networking for Innovation” and other related activities**– *Nele Vanslebrouck, Flemish Rural Network*

The training activity was initiated and hosted by the Vlaams Ruraal Netwerk ([Flemish Rural Network](#)) in Ghent, Belgium (18-19 March 2014). The peer-to-peer training event brought together more than 60 representatives of the NRNs, DG AGRI, the ENRD Contact Point, the EIP-AGRI Service Point and other interested organisations. The mixture of presentations and interactive discussions allowed the participants to build a common understanding of how NRNs can promote and support a culture of innovation; clarify how the ENRD, EIP-AGRI network and NRNs can most effectively work together; share existing relevant examples of ‘networking for innovation’; and consider specific activities that can be included in the future annual work plans (AWPs) of NRNs.

Presentations, summary reports, training materials, innovation examples and list of participants of the workshop can be found on [this page](#).

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**NRN Guidebook concept and development** –*Ines Jordana, ENRD CP*

The “Networks in Transition” NRN Guidebook for the preparation for the 2014-2020 programming period will bring together in a comprehensive way the information accumulated in the NRN Toolkit and other related tools (such as AVN stories, peer-to-peer training outcomes, NRN Self-assessment toolkit, etc.) The content will include some of the key concepts, lessons learnt for the next programming period and key methods and tools based on NRNs’ experience in a clear, comprehensive, concise and user-friendly manner.

The NRN Guidebook will be presented at the June ENRD event, and uploaded in the [NRN Toolkit](#).

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**ENRD event “6 years of connecting Rural Europe”** –*Michael Gregory, ENRD CP*

The event will offer the opportunity for ENRD stakeholders to take part in discussing the past 6 years of rural development networking and its achievements, as well as to exchange their views in relation to upcoming challenges during the 2014-2020 programming period. Presentations, summary reports, list of participants, visual and digital stories of the event can be found on [this page](#). It was announced that on the 3 June, the event will be followed by the [12<sup>th</sup> LEADER Subcommittee meeting](#) and [the 13th meeting of the Coordination Committee](#) which will take place in the same location.



## Annex I- “What Rural Networks need”

### *Summary points of facilitated discussion on future networking needs, ways of networking and cooperation among networks*

At the end of Session II of the meeting, a discussion was organised around the above topic. The outcomes of the group discussions can serve as a **useful source for planning future network support** and peer-to-peer exchange activities at European and national levels. Participants were asked to discuss in small groups (and provide feedback on):

- Key **challenges and networking needs** in the coming period,
- The **most useful ways/forms of networking support** that can help to address these needs and challenges.

The main outcomes with regard to **key challenges and networking needs** can be summarised as follows:

- ✓ **Better involvement of stakeholders:** Engaging stakeholders continues to be a key challenge for networks. It is important to ensure the commitment of people and to reach out to a ‘critical mass’ of people. Among others, network animation should be strengthened. Better connections and links need to be established, among others, with fisheries stakeholders.
- ✓ **Linking with regional RDPs, networks and rural stakeholders:** Communication and strengthened linkages with regional stakeholders is an important need for future networking. Generally, networks need to have ‘more presence in the periphery’. Communication across the programmes and dissemination of network results are key tools for better engagement with regional stakeholders.
- ✓ **Drawing up a solid action plan:** The network intervention logic and action plans are the basis of the operation of future rural networks. Getting the action plan right, and the prioritisation of tasks and activities remains a main networking challenge.
- ✓ **Network identity:** Creating and demonstrating the identity of rural networks and networking is an important challenge for future networks. It is important to understand and define what networks are and to ‘raise their profile’.
- ✓ **Addressing the issue of innovation:** Innovation and networking with EIP continues to be one of the main interests of NRNs, and were highlighted by a number of networks as an important need. It is particularly important to encourage the creation of ‘research outcomes that are relevant on-the-ground’.
- ✓ **Cooperation with various European networks** will be even more important in the coming years (including EIP and ENRD in particular). It was stressed by some of the participants that it would be essential to coordinate efforts at the European level in terms of coordination with NRNs, e.g. ensure that event dates are not clashing.

- ✓ Other topics of interest mentioned by participants were provision of **training for LAGs**, support in terms of identifying partners for projects and **cooperation** to communicate success stories, **monitoring and evaluation**, and addressing the **language** issue.

The outcomes of the group discussions on the **most useful ways/forms of networking support** can be summarised as follows:

- ✓ **Face-to-face meetings** are continued to be one of the most important forms of networking. In this sense networking meetings organised at regional, national and European levels and peer-to-peer exchange are considered to be particularly useful forms of networking support.
- ✓ **Focus groups** were mentioned as useful ways of exchanges between key stakeholders that should be continued in the future.
- ✓ The **different capacities of people/stakeholders/networks** need to be taken into account. Network membership needs to be flexible and special attention needs to be paid to newcomers.
- ✓ At the transnational level **bilateral exchanges (between Member States)** will be important, based on the level of expertise of different networks as well as their thematic interest. Benchmarking is an important element of this exchange. Cooperation on various outputs (both top-down and bottom-up), e.g. joint guidance, and staff-exchange are possible forms of cooperation that would need to be considered.
- ✓ **Thematic workshops** at national and European levels need to be set up, topics may include innovation, evaluation, communication. Peer-to-peer exchange can be one of the methods used for thematic workshops.
- ✓ Participants were **not unified** in their opinions on the usefulness of **geographical and thematic clusters**. Some thought that such clusters should continue (this is in line with the need to have more thematic exchanges and exchange between specific Member States/networks – as above). Others thought that these forms of cooperation often did not work efficiently and should not be the main forms of future European networking.
- ✓ It was suggested by participants (that in addition to face-to-face meetings) the use and usefulness of other forms of exchange, such as **webinars (e.g. for training) and more use of IT and social media** would need to be considered. At the same time, participants were somehow divided on this topic, some stressing that face-to-face exchange should continue to be the main form of networking.

## Annex II- Evaluation of the Meeting

### Results from the feedback form and comments

1. Do you agree with the following statements? (please tick ONLY ONE box per statement)

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Communication about the meeting was good	17 (45%)	17 (45%)	2 (5%)	2 (5%)		38
Organisation of the meeting whilst in Dijon was good	25 (66%)	13 (34%)				38
The venue was appropriate for this kind of meeting	26 (70%)	10 (27%)	1 (3%)			37
The interactive methods used for this meeting were very effective	17 (49%)	15 (43%)	3 (8%)			35
The meeting provided me with new and relevant information	18 (48%)	19 (52%)				37
I made new and useful contacts during the meeting	12 (32%)	24 (63%)	2 (5%)			38
I was able to fully express my comments, questions and ideas	20 (55%)	15 (40%)	2 (5%)			37

2. What is your satisfaction with the following parts of the meeting?

(Please tick ONLY ONE box per session)

	Excellent	Good	Neither	Poor	Very Poor	Total
The Added Value of Networking: Achievements of national and regional rural networks during the 2007-2013 programming period	14 (36%)	22 (56%)	3 (8%)			39
The main outcomes of ENRD Self-assessment – Edina Ocsko, ENRD CP	14 (36%)	22 (56%)	3 (8%)			39
Setting the scene on European-level networking– Matthias Langemeyer, DG AGRI	14 (38%)	17 (46%)	4 (11%)	2 (5%)		37

Overview of the “NRN in transition mapping exercise” – Elena Maccioni, ENRD CP	15 (38%)	23 (59%)	1 (3%)			39
NRNs’ networking needs: Perspective of a ‘new’ NRN – Vlatka Pavlinic, Croatian National Rural Network	11 (32%)	18 (53%)	4 (11%)	1 (2%)		34
What Rural Networks need: Discussion on future networking needs, ways of networking and cooperation among networks	13 (35%)	22 (60%)	2 (5%)			37
Presentation of Common Monitoring and Evaluation System legal requirements for 2014-2020 – Christophe Derzelle, DG AGRI	8 (21%)	27 (71%)	2 (5%)	1 (3%)		38
Feedback from the EEN good practice workshop – Eric Nieto, Evaluation Helpdesk	8 (22%)	21 (58%)	7 (20%)			36
Facilitated discussion about the distinction and the inter-linkages between NRN evaluation and self-assessment	5 (13%)	20 (53%)	10 (26%)	3 (8%)		38
Results/ outcomes of the NRN peer-to-peer training “Networking for Innovation” and other related activities –Nele Vanslebrouck, Flemish Rural Network	11 (31%)	21 (58%)	3 (8%)	1 (3%)		36
NRN Guidebook concept & development – Ines Jordana, ENRD CP	24 (63%)	11 (29%)	3 (8%)			38
ENRD event “6 years of connecting Rural Europe”– Michael Gregory, ENRD CP	14 (37%)	16 (42%)	6 (16%)	2 (5%)		38

### 3. What is your satisfaction with the following parts of the meeting? Field Visit:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Communication about the study visit was good	11 (36%)	14 (46%)	2 (7%)	3 (11%)		30
Organisation of the study visit was good	16 (58%)	12 (42%)				28
The place and activities offered were interesting and gave possibility to	17 (63%)	10 (37%)				27

understand something about local development in Cumbria						
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**Please indicate the key ideas that you are taking from this meeting:**

- To plan early, thinking what and how to evaluate before starting
- How difficult it is to evaluate the NRN results and impacts
- To develop a clear evaluation framework from outset
- NRNs/NSUs should “cultivate” a broad network of contacts outside RDP, and to make links to real beneficiaries.
- That it is as important “what” you do as “how” you will do it.
- The “writing a legacy letter” to receive it afterwards with suggestions was a new, interesting method
- More important than your message, may be how you disseminate it.
- The value of collaboration among different sectors on concrete matters
- The importance of sharing information and good practices
- Having a functional NRN seems to be crucial to rural development
- Importance of understanding networking activities and potential of local stakeholder networks
- Importance of a good intervention logic, and criteria to develop it

**Please provide suggestions on how to improve NRN meetings in the future?**

- Maybe having more time to group discussion and work in groups
- With better sound system when explaining the project.
- By finding projects that also involve the community and not only to choose projects because they were financed through the RDP.
- *“Nothing to be improved; I really appreciated the interactive way of leading the meeting”.*
- Panel discussions should engage more with the audience
- Panel discussion was interesting, but after lunch it’s difficult to concentrate.
- Provide copies of presentations at the event
- To put the presentations already in the website from the morning would help following the discussions to those that bring a computer

### Annex III – List of participants at the 21<sup>st</sup> NRN meeting

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