

EHHF Final Statement 2011

1. The rural landscapes of Europe have developed through many centuries of interaction between people and nature and are continuing to evolve. All landscapes in Europe bear witness to past and present human ingenuity and influence. They are an integral part of Europe's cultural heritage.
2. These living landscapes also provide a vital repository of the European cultural inheritance in the form of historic features, archaeology, traditional buildings, distinctive landscapes and settlements and local customs, traditions, skills and produce. Together this heritage provides the diversity, character, beauty and sense of place that defines the European countryside. The EHHF considers that this European rural heritage is important for its own sake.
3. It also has the potential to benefit rural communities by generating jobs and wealth and supporting sustainable tourism; because it promotes social and territorial cohesion by fostering a sense of European, national and local distinctiveness; and because it supports the physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing of all people, whether in the countryside or the city.
4. Rapid change to this rural heritage is affecting all European countries. These changes are driven by economic pressures; by changes to agriculture and other rural industries; by increasing urbanisation; and by demographic shifts. The cultural values of our rural heritage - and its wider contribution to society - are under threat as never before.
5. The EHHF considers that the scale of the changes and the intensity of threats to the rural heritage requires action by government at the European, national and regional level if the cultural values of rural landscapes are to be conserved and are to serve society in the future. We therefore:
 - a. Recommend to the European Commission that, in its agricultural, cultural, regional, sustainable development, and cohesion policies, it has regard to the cultural values of Europe's landscapes and uses all resources available to conserve and protect these values.
 - b. Recommend to the European Commission that its Common Agricultural Policy should acknowledge the importance of cultural landscape values and sustainable development, and should direct financial resources to their conservation and protection through rural development and agri-environment measures.
 - c. Recommend to the European Commission that its Agenda for Territorial Cohesion should acknowledge the importance of cultural landscape values as inspiration for regional and spatial planning.
 - d. Recognise the importance of national spatial planning policies in the conservation of the cultural heritage and landscapes, and in promoting sensitive

and innovative approaches to its adaptive re-use so that it continues to serve the needs of rural communities in the future.

- e. Recognise the need for the organisations responsible for cultural heritage, agriculture, and the natural environment to work more closely together, at the European, national and regional level, in order to identify their mutual interests in Europe's landscapes, and commit to working to achieve this within our respective agencies.
- f. Remind governments of the need to identify, improve and utilise inventories for the European rural heritage; to monitor the way in which it is changing; and to research and better understand the drivers of change that are acting on it.
- g. Recognise the importance of developing and exchanging approaches, tools and best practice that protects the cultural values and authenticity of Europe's rural landscapes while allowing them to continue their evolution.
- h. Recognise the importance of forming alliances with local authorities and civil society to manage change in the rural heritage in order to support sustainable solutions to the challenges posed by change.