

# Informing rural proofing in Scotland and beyond

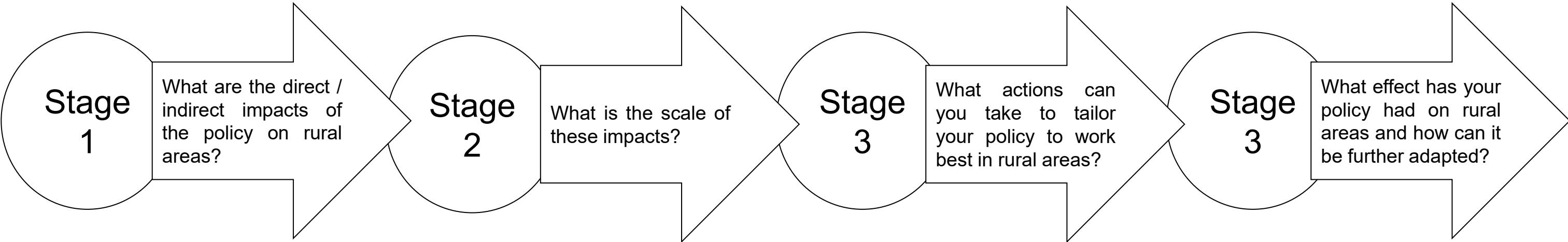


**Jane Atterton**  
Scotland's Rural College  
West Mains Road  
Edinburgh, EH9 3JG, Scotland  
Email: jane.atterton@sruc.ac.uk

## Introduction

Reviewing legislation, policies and other interventions at their design phase for their potential impacts in rural communities is known as rural proofing or applying a ‘rural lens’. If negative impacts on rural areas are possible, the intervention should be adapted to ensure they do not happen.

Some countries have been rural proofing for decades, but there is mixed evidence of success. The Scottish Government made a commitment to apply a rural lens to National Strategy for Economic Transformation (NSET) projects in late 2022. All policies will be rural proofed through the forthcoming Rural Delivery Plan.



The Rural Proofing Process (adapted from Defra's Rural Proofing Guidance, 2022, [Rural proofing - GOV.UK](#))

## Methods

- Desk-based work and interviews in ‘Reimagined policy futures: Shaping inclusive, sustainable and just rural and island communities in Scotland (ReRIC)’ reviewed the evolution of rural and island policy in Scotland since 1945.
- A SEFARI Specialist Advisory Group advised the Scottish Government on implementing a rural lens across policy areas.
- Linked work with the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) and the EU’s Rural Pact informed the implementation of rural proofing across EU member states and regions.
- Work with El Hueco and Cives Mundi informed rural proofing in Castilla-La Mancha, Spain.

## Results

- Many issues have repeatedly featured in Scotland’s rural policies and strategies in recent decades (e.g. affordable housing, service provision, transport and digital connectivity, etc.).
- Limited if any (publicly-available) evaluation of, and learning from, previous interventions.
- Commitment to rural proof NSET projects in 2022 represented a shift in approach to rural policy in Scotland.
- Scottish Government launched Rural Assessment Toolkit (internally) in Spring 2025; Rural Delivery Plan to be published soon.
- Commitment for EU member states to rural proof in the European Commission’s ‘Long term vision for rural areas’ (2021).
- Some regional level rural proofing, e.g. in Castilla-La Mancha, where rural proofing is connected with tackling long term depopulation.
- Recent attempts in England, Ireland and Canada to reinvigorate rural proofing, Northern Ireland remains only country to have legislated for it, proved hard to achieve well elsewhere. Evidence of ‘success’ is mixed (even limited).
- Island proofing (through Island Communities Impact Assessments) is a legislative requirement in Scotland, but applying the Rural Assessment Toolkit is voluntary.

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### RURAL ASSESSMENT TOOLKIT

Guidance to consider rural needs during policy making and delivery

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Scottish Government's (internal) Rural Assessment Toolkit



## Key Questions

- How can we proof for multiple and diverse ruralities?
- If rural proofing is voluntary, will it happen?
- What can rural proofing learn from Island Communities Impact Assessments?
- What does ‘successful’ rural proofing look like? Is it about process or outcomes, or both?
- What geographies/levels of governance should engage in rural proofing?
- What role should researchers play in rural proofing?



Community Garden on Arran

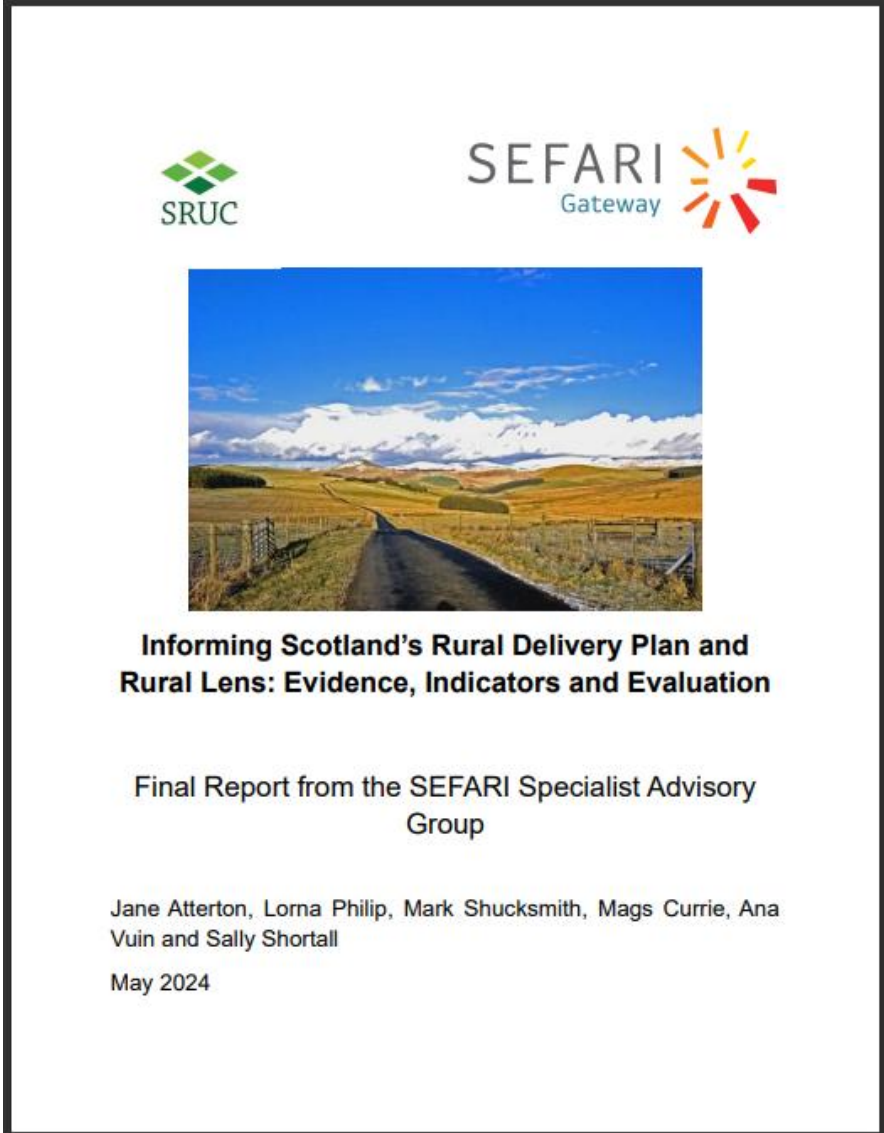


Cumbrae

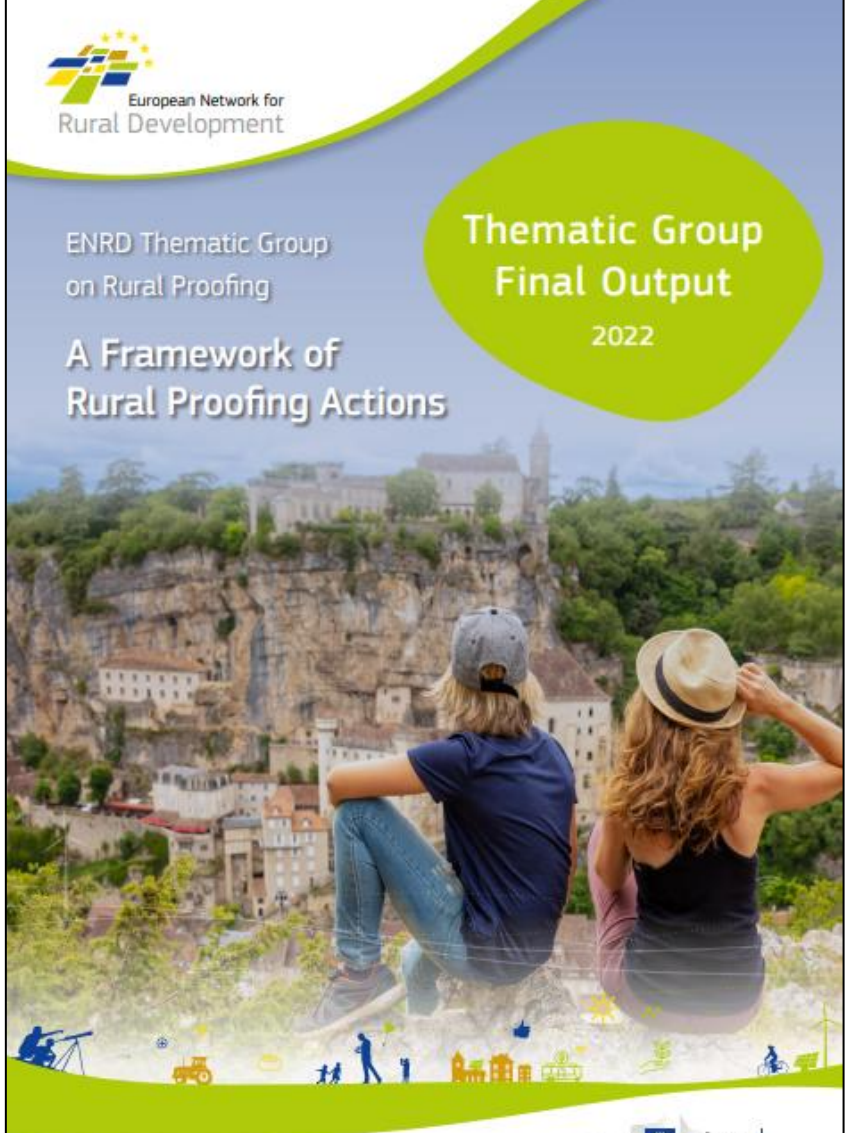
## References



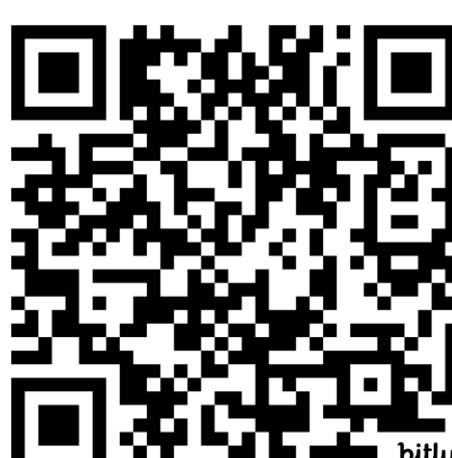
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## The Team



Ana Winship (née Vuin)  
[Ana.vuin@sruc.ac.uk](mailto:Ana.vuin@sruc.ac.uk)



Carey Doyle  
[Carey.doyle@sruc.ac.uk](mailto:Carey.doyle@sruc.ac.uk)

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