

Ross and Cromarty

The diverse nature of the Ross-shire economy presented a number of opportunities and challenges in 2005-06. These included the continued expansion, diversification and development of the engineering sector, increasing numbers of cruise ships visiting the area and low unemployment. Good local partnership working and continued high profile interests such as the proposed Forscot timber processing plant also contributed to an air of vibrancy. Ross and Cromarty Enterprise played its part by meeting all targets and supporting a range of complementary projects and initiatives.

We assisted 51 business growth projects, including helping JP Knight (Caledonia) Ltd purchase a new tug boat while Amora Perfumes was supported to expand into purpose-built premises. We focused on helping the area's migrant worker population settle into the area and supported 422 local young people and adults towards employment. We awarded training assistance to 66 local businesses, including £23,000 to Umax Ltd. and £3,300 to the Conon Hotel.

An innovative project aimed at exploring international trade activities helped 26 businesses. These included Sureclean, which undertook a trade mission to Libya and Isleburn Mackay and Macleod which targeted Scandinavia.

Ross-shire communities were well served by the continued success of the EU-funded Community Economic Development programme in the four areas where it operates. A total of 81 projects enhancing community assets were also approved, including a new clubhouse for North Kessock Bowling Club and the Tain Mussel Mural project which will improve the environment of the town.

Area profile



Population: 50,000
Area: 500,000 hectares
Business start-ups: 5.4 per 1,000 population in 2005
Key sectors: manufacturing, construction and financial services

2005-06 targets and out-turns

	Target	Out-turn	Performance %
Strengthening communities			
New/enhanced community assets	60	81	135
Community groups with increased capacity	15	25	167
Developing skills and learning			
People supported to move towards and into sustainable work	365	418	115
Businesses supported to engage in developing the skills of those in work	100	101	101
Growing businesses			
New business starts	60	61	102
Business growth projects	50	51	102
Making global connections			
Private sector earnings index* (%)	108	106	98
Businesses engaging in international business development	15	14	93

* This expresses wages in assisted projects relative to average wages in the local area. A value of over 100 indicates higher than average wages.
 From April 2006, two new local enterprise companies - HIE Inverness and East Highland, and HIE Skye and Wester Ross - began sharing responsibilities for the Ross and Cromarty area. The Network's Invergordon office became the local centre for HIE Inverness and East Highland.

2005-06 highlights

Lifeskills Through Sport assisted 20,000 young people, over 100 of whom were in the 'hard to help' group.

We supported a management buyout to continue the principal operations of Wester Ross Salmon with £400,000 financial assistance, securing 50 jobs directly.

A programme of work in conjunction with Scottish Development International resulted in 16 local businesses developing their export potential.

We achieved our Scottish Executive target of 75 approved Business Learning Accounts and over 140 contacts with Ross-shire businesses.

We continued to support the four EU-funded Community Economic Development partnerships to identify new activities and enable the continuation of their work after the programme ends.

We helped start 61 new businesses.

The HIE network's first welcome pack for Polish workers was produced and distributed.



Clifford Davidson, chairman



Maitland Hyslop, chief executive

Case studies



Milton Community Woodland

This innovative project saved woodland dating back to the 17th century for the community and now offers summer events, opportunities for recreation and education for children and adults. Milton Community Woodland Trust was supported by £5,000 from RACE and £5,000 EU funding.



Migrant workers

As one of a series of projects to help migrant workers, we funded a post with Alness Citizens Advice Bureau to support to the migrant worker community and liaise with local businesses. This service is widely used and should help migrants to stay and settle in the area.



R&J Bews

We helped Invergordon firm R&J Bews identify an opportunity to diversify its business through recycling redundant whisky casks. Our grant funding enabled the company to invest in woodchipping and bagging equipment to supply wood chips for the food smoking industry.



Sureclean

Alness-based cleaning specialist Sureclean was helped to diversify into training and develop overseas business. We provided international trade advice and funded a trade mission to Libya.