

## ADMG REGIONAL MEETING

at Reay Forest Estate, Achfary, Lairg on 30<sup>th</sup> July 2014

### Confirmed Attendance

Richard Cooke	Chairman
Finlay Clark	Secretary
David Allison	Executive Committee
Julian Clark	Executive Committee
Victor Clements	Executive Committee
Willie Fraser	Executive Committee
Anson MacAuslan	Executive Committee
Douglas McAdam	Executive Committee
Colin McLean	Executive Committee
Jim Payne	Executive Committee
Linzi Seivwright	Executive Committee
Bruce Sewell	Executive Committee
Jamie Williamson	Executive Committee
Randal Wilson	Executive Committee
Alison Alston	Harris & Lewis DMG
Ann Mackay	North West Sutherland DMG
Pieter Bakker	North West Sutherland DMG
Crispian Cook	North Ross DMG
Mark Foxwell	West Sutherland DMG
Alistair Gibson	West Lochaber DMG
John Hay	Affric & Kintail DMG
Andy Hibbert	Loch Assynt Lodge Estate
Robbie Kernahan	SNH
Brian Lyall	Caithness & Sutherland Area Representative
Archie MacLellan	South West Ross DMG
Andrew Marsham	North West Sutherland DMG
Peter Mayhew	Environment LINK Group
Dr Bill McKerrow	Affric & Kintail DMG
Neil Morrison	Coulin Estate/South West Ross DMG
Don O'Driscoll	John Muir Trust
Brendan O'Hanrahan	Assynt Foundation
David Rankin	Benmore Estate
Megan Robertson	West Sutherland DMG
Craig Ross	Inchnadamph Estate
Frank Spencer-Nairn	Glen Strathfarrar DMG
Susan Steven	Affric & Kintail, Glenmoriston & Strathconon DMGs
James Vestey	Benmore Estate
David Walker Smith	Middle Inver
Mary Walker Smith	Middle Inver
Roddy Watt	Merkland Estate

## 1. Apologies

James Adamson	Executive Committee
Leo Barclay	Executive Committee
Col. Bewsher	Executive Committee
John Bruce	Executive Committee
Lynda Campbell	Executive Committee
Julian Clarke	Executive Committee
James Duncan Millar	Executive Committee
Andrew Gordon	Executive Committee
Glen Heggs	Executive Committee
Willy Inglis	Executive Committee
Justin Irvine	Executive Committee
George Macdonald	Executive Committee
Ewen Macpherson	Executive Committee
John Morison	Executive Committee
Dick Playfair	Executive Committee
Maitland Rankin	Executive Committee
Jim Beattie	Mid-West DMG
Leif Brag	Inverary & Tyndrum DMG
Edward Crookes	Englefield Estate
William Jackson	Strathtay DMG
David Lowes	Inverary & Tyndrum DMG
Derick Macaskill	West Sutherland DMG
Hamish MacCorquodale	Mid-West DMG
Ewen Maclean	East Loch Shiel DMG
James Macpherson-Fletcher	Monadhliaths & Glenelg DMG
Neil McKay	SSE Renewables
Malcolm Mcphail	Harris & Lewis DMG
Clive Meikle	Glen Strathfarrar DMG
Mark Nicolson	East Grampian DMG
Donald Rice	Dundonnell
Susanna Thomson	Black Mount DMG
Tom Turnbull	Strone Estate
Iain Wotherspoon	Strathtay DMG
Kirsty MacLeod	West Sutherland DMG
Kenny Burns	Associate Member
Peter Keyser	Associate Member
Kenny MacLeod	Associate Member
Ron Smith	Corporate Member
Ian Thornber	Associate Member
George Vestey	Associate Member

## **2. Minutes of Regional Meeting at Huntingtower Hotel, Perth on 14<sup>th</sup> April 2014**

The Minutes had been approved by the Executive Committee and were available. -

## **3. Matters Arising**

**All matters arising were on the Agenda with the exception of:-**

**4.2 Heading for the Scottish Hills (HFTSH) –** SNH had indicated that they would not be in a position to fund HFTSH beyond the current year, while recognising the demand for it from both land managers and access takers. They were however meeting with ADMG and others to explore other sources of funding or an alternative model to retain and extend HFTSH for the future. ADMG has suggested that the operating cost could be significantly reduced if the information was provided by Estates that wished to participate through their own websites, accessed through a link on a HFTSH page on the SNH website.

**7.2.2 Birnam Seminar** - The Seminar had taken place on 19<sup>th</sup> May. It was for DMG office bearers and had focused this year on the Benchmark and the public interest in deer management. There had been two presentations followed by two DMG case studies relevant to the topics. The afternoon session had consisted of a role play approach to DMG meetings and decision making.

**8 PACEC Economic Study** – The PACEC questionnaire had recently been circulated. This is intended to gather economic and employment information in relation to the whole deer management sector rather than just stalking as in the 2006 study. The Chairman emphasised the importance of having reliable information particularly with the increasing focus on the economic benefits and costs arising from deer management. He urged

all concerned to complete and submit the questionnaire.

#### **4. Chairman's Report**

Since the April meeting the Chairman has attended four DMG meetings, worked closely with SNH in regard to the development of the Joint Collaborative Deer Management Project (JCDMP), attended a number of Committee Meetings and had a productive first meeting with the new SNH Chairman, Ian Ross.

#### **5. Admin Report**

The Secretary presented figures including the unaudited results for the subscription year to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2014 and the income and expenditure forecast for the current year to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2015.

#### **6. Political Report**

Dick Playfair had sent his apologies. The Chairman read extracts from DP's Political Report in the most recent issue of Scope in which he had covered the deliberations of both the Scottish Affairs Committee at Westminster and the Rural Affairs Committee at Holyrood in relation to the recently published Report by the Land Reform Review Group. The Chairman said that it was important to have this political context very much in mind in all matters relating to deer management in view of their high current political profile.

#### **7. ADMG/SNH Joint Collaborative Deer Management Project (JCDMP)**

The Chairman reminded those present of the outcome of the Rural Affairs Committee Review and their recommendations to the Minister and his response. In effect the deer sector has two years in which to prove that the voluntary principle can deliver effective deer management which also meets the public interest. He was aware that the great majority of Groups understand this and are making good progress.

The JCDMP is intended to support DMGs in going forward and provide tools to help them do so. These include:-

- **DMG Benchmark** – now printed following wide consultation and circulated to all DMGs, available [www.deer-](http://www.deer-)

[management.co.uk/publications](http://management.co.uk/publications). Some DMGs are already using the Benchmark.

- **DMG Assessments** – as noted above all DMGs will be expected to show significant progress by end 2016. For that purpose it is necessary to establish, in each case, the present level of performance and to follow this up in two years time to show what progress has been made. The DMG Assessment system is intended to do this and falls into two parts. Firstly a DMG performance assessment based directly on the Benchmark, and, secondly, an assessment of the public benefits already delivered by DMGs and the additional public benefits deliverable in the near future. SNH will be required to report to Government how DMGs rate in terms of the public interest and, to assist DMGs in this aspect of deer management planning, they had identified 14 public interest criteria for deer management from the Code of Practice for Deer Management.
- **Data Processing** - SNH had commissioned the development of a computer programme which DMGs will be able to use to record and analyse management data which they collect, for example count and cull data and habitat assessment information.

The Chairman then invited Linzi Seivwright to explain the Assessment process emphasising that this is still in development and that comments and suggestions would be welcome. LS presented Assessment spreadsheets for both DMG performance and public interest explaining how these had been developed and how they could be used. She emphasised that DMGs will not be expected to undertake the Assessment themselves. This will be carried out by the SNH local DMO with ADMG input where necessary. A number of Assessments had already been carried out during the development process and the Groups involved had generally found the process constructive and helpful despite initial concerns when it was first put forward. This was confirmed by three DMG Chairs in the audience who were pleased to recommend the process having found it straightforward and useful. In particular they commented that the public interest analysis had identified a high degree of public benefit from existing management as well as areas where improvements could be made without difficulty.

LS also put up a Deer Management Plan template. A number of Groups have asked for this but she emphasised that SNH is not recommending a particular format for Deer Management Plans. DMGs might wish to use existing Plans or an approach that suits their local circumstances. For example some DMPs are now largely map based. She informed those present that SNH had been allocated £200,000 for use over 2014 and 2015 to contribute to the cost of Deer Management Planning and related matters. SNH has therefore designed a grant scheme offering a maximum of £12,500 per DMG on a 50/50 match fund basis. An application form has been created and it will be a condition of all applications that an Assessment, as described above, is completed and submitted with the application.

There were a number of comments and questions from the floor and a general recognition that the step change and culture change implied by these new mechanisms is necessary. The experience of those DMGs which had undertaken the Assessments on a trial basis were considered to be reassuring.

LS concluded by saying that SNH has set themselves a target of completing Assessments for all 48 DMGs by the end of September. She recognised that this was a challenging timescale but SNH staff time has been allocated for the purpose. In view of the short overall timescale to 2016 it is essential that the Deer Management Planning process starts in all Groups as soon as possible.

## 8. **Committee Reports:-**

(a) **Scottish Venison Partnership/SQWV** – In the absence of Dick Playfair RC reported that the Scottish Venison Partnership has applied to Europe for PGI status for Scottish Wild Venison. If successful this will be valuable in strengthening the brand and adding to the good work of the Partnership to date in growing UK consumption of Scottish Venison, even beyond the present level of supply. SVP has also been involved in a project to set up a small number of model deer farm units.

(b) **SCTSG** – RC reported the appointment of the new Project Officer, Andrew Grainger, to replace Victoria

Brooks. SCSTG is also undertaking a review of its purpose and marketing strategy.

- (c) **Moorland Forum and National Access Forum** – Robert Balfour represents ADMG on both Fora. He was not present but the Chairman and Secretary receive copy papers and there are no current deer related issues before either Forum.
- (d) **Best Practice Steering Group** – ADMG is represented by Colin McClean and the Chairman has recently rejoined the Steering Group to represent Lowland Deer Network Scotland. At a recent meeting consideration had been given to a number of new Guides and some Guide reviews particularly relating to the management of peri-urban deer.
- (e) **Competence Steering Group** – Colin McClean represents ADMG. The Group has not met recently but the campaign to promote Competence, i.e. DSC Level 1 qualification or equivalent, particularly to those not directly involved in mainstream deer management, continues. SNH had put considerable resources to this but the impact with the farming and crofting community in particular remains disappointing, despite best efforts.

## 9. SNH Update

Robbie Kernahan advised the meeting that the 20 year policy document, "Scotland's Wild Deer: A National Approach" was currently undergoing its first 5 year review. This would involve some changes but it will not be radically different other than to emphasise public interest themes. RK also said that there was a plan to encourage the main research establishments such as James Hutton and Rowett, to consolidate the results of their bank of deer research. He also referred to the Rapid Habitat Assessment system developed by Macaulay approximately 15 years ago. Approximately one million hectares were surveyed at that time and he would be making a case for funding to carry out a repeat exercise. It will be valuable to pick up any changes and he is hopeful that many of these will show an improvement in habitats across the deer range, beyond designated sites which are

monitored differently. The Chairman confirmed that this would be of considerable value to DMGs.

## **10. Local Issues**

The Chairman invited those DMGs present to give a short update on the current state of their Groups and any current issues or concerns:-

**Randal Wilson – North Ross DMG** – The Assessment process referred to above was to be carried out in the following week and the Deer Management Plan is in draft. It has also been agreed to carry out habitat training. RW is temporary ADMG Chair of the Group and expects to hand over to a Group Member at the AGM in the autumn.

**Randal Wilson – West Ross DMG** – Assessment pending. DMP and habitat assessments in place.

**David Allison – West Sutherland DMG** – The Group does not yet have a Deer Management Plan but will be commencing the process shortly. Assessments have been carried out in all four sub groups very recently and had gone well. The Ardvar situation is ongoing and is well known to all.

**Andrew Marsham – North West Sutherland DMG** – The Group has commissioned the writing of a Deer Management Plan by Victor Clements with funding assistance from SNH. VC is at the data collection and consultation stage prior to commencing writing the Plan and he reported that the process was going well although there are a number of difficult issues in the area. Pieter Bakker, who represents Altnaharra Estate in the Group, expressed his serious concern that his neighbour, Wildland Limited, intends culling heavily, which could lead to a one-third reduction in the total population of the DMG area, which is already at a very low density. He asked Robbie Kernahan whether it is not possible for SNH to control excessive culling on economic grounds. RK said that the Wildlife & Natural Environment Act does allow for this but that, at this stage at least, the methodology for establishing economic impacts does not exist. One possibility would be to use the Section 7 mechanism but, as things stand, it is not possible to establish sufficient grounds in the absence of a full economic analysis. This is for ongoing consideration and ADMG will continue to take an interest. The Chairman commented on the fact that the Group is now working towards having a Deer Management Plan and pointed out that a DMP has the benefit of requiring discussion as to the management objectives of individual DMG



members and promoting a negotiated and comprising approach to unilateral action.

**Jamie Williamson – Monadhlaiths DMG** – Strath Caulaidh Limited has been commissioned by the Group, supported by SNH, to prepare a Deer Management Plan. They have been engaged in the initial study of the large and complex area and have already submitted a 180 page paper for consideration by the Group. It is expected that this will become an Appendix to the Deer Management Plan, once written, and the DMP will in itself be a shorter document. JW added that 80% of the total cull now being taken is a control cull and this has a serious impact on the sporting culls on many stalking estates.

**Frank Spencer-Nairn – Glen Strathfarrar DMG** – A useful habitat assessment training day.

**Willie Fraser – Glenmoriston DMG** – An Assessment had been carried out by Linzi Seivwright in the previous week and had been a useful and informative exercise. The Group had been working to the Benchmark and now has a Constitution and is currently working well.

**Alistair Gibson – West Lochaber DMG** – AG had recently attended a useful habitat assessment training day in a neighbouring Group. A poaching case in the area is likely to come to Court shortly and will involve DNA based evidence for the first time.

## **11. Any Other Business**

There was no other business from the floor.

## **12. Date of Next Meeting**

3<sup>rd</sup> December 2014, Inverness, time and located to be confirmed.

Following conclusion of the main meeting David Allison gave a short, interesting and forward looking presentation on Reay Forest Estate, offering to show those interested around the main estate buildings following lunch.

There was a vote of thanks to Westminster Estates for arranging the meeting and providing lunch and refreshments.