

SLIDE 1

Thank you Chairman for inviting me to speak to ADMG members about the stakeholder event held during the summer by the Monadhliath Deer Management Group at Alvie and Dalraddy Estates.

During the development of the MDMG Strategic Deer Management Plan between 2013 and its adoption in the spring of 2015 we set up a member Task Group to provide a quick response/sounding board for our technical consultants, Strath Caulidh. As part of our response to the requirement in the Benchmark for good communications with local stakeholders/communities we agreed that in addition to formal pre-adoption engagement with Scottish Natural Heritage and a specialist stakeholder meeting with FCS, RSPB, CNPA and others, we would also provide a day event with local stakeholders when the SDMP was formally adopted.

Our decision to carry out this post adoption discussion was in part due to time constraints but also in the knowledge that the adopted plan is a working document which has room for the inclusion of information and advice from a range of local people and organizations.

Deer Management Groups may feel, as Richard Cooke states, under the cosh, but we are not alone. Yesterday I attended a stakeholder event at Faslane held by the Royal Navy. They too have taken the decision to consult on their long standing biannual international training exercise Join Warrior to better understand the various impacts of their activities on landowners, crofters and farmers, local communities and the broad land, air and marine environment within which they operate. They used exactly the same technique, the demonstration day format, that we used at Alvie Estate, a morning of presentations with plenty time for Q&A.

In reference to Holly Deary's point about the difference between consultation and communication which is well made, we took a view that we needed to communicate the aims and objectives of our SDMP to local stakeholders with sufficient detail to allow us to consult with them in a manner that would provide us with some useable feedback.

I'm not armed with a lengthy power point presentation, just four slides and with them I aim to provide you with an understanding who your audience might be, how we structured our event and what we wanted from our audience.

This may be slightly different for each of you but I doubt it will vary much across the country

SLIDE 2

Like most of you I don't have a pool of talent to call on when I set up a meeting. This entire event was created on a couple of sheets of paper on my desk using the authority of the TG and agreement from Jamie Williamson to use his house and estate for the day.

Local stakeholders are, in my opinion, everyone outside your membership who have an interest in deer/habitat management Estate staff who don't normally attend DMG meetings but whose livelihoods depend in part on Deer management.

Farmers and crofters outside your RDMA who may be shooting deer and these culls are not being captured in your data sets.

Households in the area with garden damage by deer. People affected by roadkills, Representatives, Community Councils, local authority staff and Members, MSPs, your MP or MEP. All these will have interests in the subject. Rural Affairs Committee Members and ScotGov Staff. Local NGOs who may not be part of the specialist stakeholder consultations. Build up a contact list and invite them all. We made it more attractive by using the demo day format, presentations in the morning, lunch and an interesting visit up the hill with transport provided. Although we asked the participants to bring their own lunch.

We also invited a company who provide unmanned helicopters (drones) to give a demonstration of their kit and Jamie Williamson gave one of his entertaining and informative presentations on the ups and downs of managing a highland estate.

SLIDE 3

We tried to make the event look attractive by using the demo day format. Presentations in the morning, lunch and an interesting visit up the hill with transport provided, although we asked the participants to bring their own lunch to keep costs down.

We also invited a company who provide un-manned helicopters (drones) to give a demonstration of their kit and Jamie Williamson gave one of his entertaining and informative presentations on the ups and downs of managing a highland estate. We used much of a day to deal with the event given the large number of attendees (50+).

Some of your audience will like ours, be unaware or ill-informed about deer management planning. We provided a detailed outline of our plan, Dougie Campbell of Strath Cauldh and I each taking turn to describe a section and then let the audience respond. This broke down the presentation into smaller chunks and helped to encourage responses.

You will need to communicate to everyone some basic information about of your area, membership – how many, who are they, size – where are its boundaries, is the boundary fenced and if so what condition is it in? Give some background and history – when was the DMG established, what were its original aims, any big issues in the past and what you are dealing with now. Be as open as you feel able to be.

Describe the reasons for the new Strategic DMP – RACCE intervention, desire for Govt to ensure public interests are catered for, timescales, etc Explain who is producing the DMP, is it a consultant like Strath Cauldh, or is it one of the members, give some background to the skills and experience required to analyse all available information within the DMG, consider the objectives of each member, consider the requirements of legislation applying to the area – particularly to important conservation sites and advise the where and what of these areas. Talk about the Benchmark and its importance in setting the public interest issues.

Changes in ownership and how this affected the group's dynamics

Project background

Update plan in line with Code of Practice Take full account: private & public interest and the Framework for sustainable deer management. Aim to Set out clear proposals, identify key priorities including potential conflicts and describe detailed processes to address these. Look at how data is gathered and how information flows.

Our DMP is a 10 year project and we are looking at a range of issues, Welfare, Environment, Economic development and Social well being. We looked at current policy context and anticipated changes over this period. We above all developed a collective series of objectives and actions.

Planning Process

How we attended to the review. We set up a Task group who included our consultants and other non-member specialists. The contract ran from Jul 13 – Feb 15 (18 months). Our consultants met with: TG, DMG, SNH and Estate members. These were structured interviews and site visits that in turn helped inform a detailed analysis or Strategic Review of Deer Management in the area. The Deer Management Plan then developed from discussion and debate around the findings of the strategic review.

Findings

Owners - MDMG over 40 and not always easy to contact them. Highly complex ownership with a high level of change since 60's. Varied mixture of interest with each trying to co-exist side-by-side. All expressed a lot of concern over the future for deer management.

Major differences in way estates run some fully commercial some not at all, a mixture of resident owners, regular visitors and some only occasionally on site.

There are owner run estates, keeper managed, some with many keepers and some with none at all. The age profile of owners is high. Renewable energy income is a factor with a number of estates.

Socio-economics

74 FTE keepers (56E and 18W)
23 for deer / 51 for other activities'

Ownership pattern is complex and changing and the economics are fragile. The landscape has fundamental limits and the deer population is highly mobile and interconnected.

Overarching concepts and broad aims of the SDMP

Policy & legal context is shifting quickly and the DMG needed better funding and formal structures in place to cope with future challenges. A formal plan of action was required with a series of agreed objectives
Manage for appropriate local deer densities while producing better stags for sporting.

Deliver significant public benefits and focus on designated sites while keeping an eye on the wider landscape scale issues.

Create and sustain rural employment, promote the voluntary approach to deer management, encourage pre-emptive action using best practice.

Concepts for 'deer-focused' owners.

Reduce hind populations locally to produce high quality stags (target is 1:1 adult sex ratio)
Expand 'missing' habitats for stags to winter in
Expand overall area for stags to range in
Improve quality of current habitat for stags
"Populations resilient, self-contained and less likely to move"
Encourage research & monitoring > learn more!
Public benefits (+ for other estates)...
Reduced local deer densities
Reduced conflicts with other land users
Reduced tensions within DMG – 'positive trajectory'
Population trajectory = declining
Marked improvements on designated sites
Improve current condition but expansion is actually the key aim, wider environmental improvements inevitable SNH funds are used positively and productively and the DMG is a 'hub' for decision-making in uplands.

SLIDE 4

The entire point of the exercise is to gather feedback from your local stakeholders.

Be prepared to push them and prod them on the day – capture their comments.

We need to know who is culling outside the RDMA.

We need to know who is missing from our stakeholder group and year on year build them up to be a supportive but critical group.

We need to capture information and assemble it over the 10yrs of the plan to help advise what we do.

We need to action, where appropriate, advice we have been given and ensure their comments form an appendix to our evolving plan. This is essential in providing our stakeholders with confidence that we are taking them seriously. In essence, we are communicating, consulting, considering and responding.