

ADMG Regional Meeting
At Kingsmills Hotel, Inverness
On Monday 9 November 2015

Present:

Richard Cooke	Chairman
Andrew Gordon	Vice Chairman
Finlay Clark	Secretary
Helen Polley	Secretarial Support
Lynda Campbell	Executive Committee
Julian Clarke	Executive Committee
Victor Clements	Executive Committee
Holly Deary	Executive Committee
James Duncan Millar	Executive Committee
Willie Fraser	Executive Committee
Alistair Gibson	Executive Committee
Robbie Kernahan	Executive Committee
Ewen Macpherson	Executive Committee
Pete Mayhew	Executive Committee
Doug McAdam	Executive Committee
Bob McIntosh	Executive Committee
Colin McClean	Executive Committee
John Morison	Executive Committee
Dick Playfair	Executive Committee
Linzi Seivwright	Executive Committee
Tom Turnbull	Executive Committee
Randal Wilson	Executive Committee
James Allan	Bidwells
Pieter Bakker	North West Sutherland DMG
Will Boyd-Wallis	Cairngorm National Park Authority
Katrina Candy	Bidwells
Tom Chetwynd	East Sutherland DMG
Alistair Christie	Ben Alder Estate
Crispian Cook	North Ross DMG
Mike Cottam	Cairngorms & Speyside DMG
Patrick Creasey	North Ross DMG
Richard Curzon	Tullich
Roddie Feilden	Mid West DMG
Donald Fraser	SNH
Falcon Frost	Balquhidder DMG
David Gillies	Islay DMG
Sir Patrick Grant	Knoydart DMG
John Hay	Mullardoch
Willie Lamont	FES
Douglas Langlands	Ardverikie Estate
Colin Lavin	FES
David Lowes	Inverary & Tyndrum DMG
Shaun MacDonald	South West Ross DMG
Seamus MacNally	Gairloch Conservation Unit
Joanna Macpherson	Lochalsh DMG
Alan Macleod	Corrour
Jonathan Mason	North Ross DMG
Drew McFarlane-Slack	Monadhliaths DMG

Gillian Pattinson	South West Ross DMG
Mark Pattinson	South West Ross DMG
Donald Rowantree	Corrour
Robbie Rowantree	East Sutherland DMG
Duncan Shaw	Gualin
Frank Spencer Nairn	Glen Strathfarrar DMG
Susan Steven	Affric & Kintail and Glenmoriston DMGs

Peter Keyser	Associate Member
Jimmy Ruggles-Brise	Associate Member

In attendance:

Dr Aileen MacLeod	Minister for the Environment
Andrew Taylor	Scottish Government

Apologies:

Bill Bewsher	Executive Committee
Stephen Gibbs	Executive Committee
Willy Inglis	Executive Committee
James Adamson	Scottish Woodlands
Richard Barclay	Breadalbane DMG
Jane Cheape	Moidart DMG
Charlotte Gilfillan	East Grampian DMG
Steven Gray	Balmacaan Estate
Malcolm MacPhail	Harris & Lewis DMG
Hamish McCorquodale	Midwest DMG
Clive Meikle	Glen Strathfarrar DMG
Mark Nicolson	East Grampian DMG
Malcolm Taylor	East Grampian DMG

Donald Cameron	Associate Member
Derek Stead	Associate Member

1.	<p>Chairman's welcome and introduction</p> <p>1.1 Richard Cooke, ADMG Chairman, welcomed everyone and the Minister in particular to the 3rd Regional Meeting of the year.</p> <p>1.2 RC's notes setting the scene for the meeting are appended to these minutes.</p> <p>1.3 As Dr McLeod was unable to stay for the whole meeting he adjusted the Agenda to start with DMG update reports.</p>	
2.	<p>DMG Reports</p> <p>Those representing DMGs in attendance gave their reports.</p> <p><u>2.1 Inveraray & Tyndrum, and Balquhidder DMGs (David Lowes)</u></p> <p>2.1.1 DL reported that both Groups had had meetings. Inveraray and Tyndrum: Bruce Crawford MSP had attended the meeting, and 5 community councils were represented, all new to the meeting.</p>	

They were interested to discover the issues faced by the DMG and its economic challenges.

2.1.2 Balquhiddy DMG: DL referred to the very thin line between a sporting and management cull, and remarked that some £20,000 to £25,000 was generated for the rural economy in addition to venison sales of some £20,000. FCS was a vital and active participant in the Balquhiddy Group. DL urged continuation of the voluntary principle and further engagement with local communities.

2.2 Lochalsh DMG (Ewen Macpherson)

The Group has 4 members plus FCS and covers some 45,000 Ha. Four estates share the same management objective, with no major problems. The upgraded DMP is due to be signed off shortly. Very heavy mortality this year due to the very wet winter with few calves surviving.

2.3 Breadalbane DMG (Victor Clements)

The Group has 32 members. A meeting was held on the DMP in October and whether to go into a further Section 7 agreement. Most members were in favour of renewing the S7 for a further 5 years. Once agreement on this is reached the DMP can be signed off.

2.4 West Lothian DMG (Alistair Gibson)

Four Community Councils were now engaged. The next Group meeting is due to take place in early December.

2.5 Cairngorms/Speyside DMG (Mike Cottam)

MC reported that there were 18 active estates within the Group. The draft DMP (the DMG's third DMP) had been circulated to members, and will also now go to Community Councils to engage them before the DMP is adopted in February 2016. Some gaps in delivery had been identified including suggested partnership, engagement with wildlife groups, access and other activities, but generally "in good shape".

2.6 East Grampian DMG - sub area 2 (Colin McClean)

There are 7 estates within the sub-group, and a lot of grouse interest. The draft DMP is due before the end of December.

2.7 South Perthshire DMG (James Duncan Miller)

2.7.1 The Group had extended into the South Loch Tay area, and the South Loch Tay plan had been amended. There were a range of interests in the western sector with a mix of sheep and deer; the central area has sheep, deer and grouse interests, and the eastern grouse and some deer. It was noted that there were a lot of fallow towards Birnam and Dunkeld. The Group as a whole has 32 members and it may be sensible to split this into 3 conforming to the existing sub groups. The draft DMP is due for delivery by the end of the year.

2.7.2 The stag cull had only just been achieved with a shortage noted in some places (south of Crieff). The hind cull had been tough to date, with a lot of mist and still days. Hind numbers appeared to be less than the previous 4 years.

2.8 West Ross DMG (Randal Wilson)

The Group's membership covered forestry, agriculture and sporting interests. The Group's 2013 - 2018 DMP had been approved, but with the Benchmark there were various aspects including those of public benefit to be added. Financial assistance from the SNH grant has been applied for. The Group had been used as a pilot for SWARD. Some 'joined up thinking' was required with Government agencies on achieving minimum stocking densities, ie sheep as well as deer. Management issues had been noted in relation to the Fannichs and An Teallach SSSI.

2.9 Mid West Association DMG (Roddie Feilden)

The Group covers some 100,000 Ha extending from Fort William to Dalwhinnie with a complex membership and different objectives. It had however worked well for many years. The Group is well advanced with its new DMP, part funded by SNH, and RF anticipated that it would be 'fully compliant' in early 2016. High 2014/15 winter mortality had been noted.

2.10 West Grampian DMG (Andrew Gordon)

The Group covered 730 sq km and 19 businesses. It was split into 3 distinct areas: West Glen Tilt – high Grampian mountains and mainly deer range; Centre, Beinn a'Ghlo – heavily stocked with both deer and livestock; south, with conflicting interests of farming (sheep), forestry and estate businesses. A DMP had been in existence for 10 years embracing deer and stock management, public access and other public interest. A new DMP was being written to be ready for Spring 2016. All owners with just a couple of exceptions were engaged in this process. The Group had also engaged with local Community Councils although they had not shown immediate interest.

2.11 North Ross DMG (Crispian Cooke)

The group covered 150,000 Ha, with 25 members and is expanding to take in additional neighbouring land. There is a diverse range of ownership – crofting, National Forest Estate, private landowners, and a large public access interest and long distance footpath. The Group area includes many historical features and designated sites and about 19 per cent of its area is woodland cover. The Group's first DMP was written in 2002. The current plan had been approved by the Group and SNH in November 2015. The Group is focused on habitat monitoring and deer counts. There are two areas covered by Section 7 agreements.

	<p><u>2.12 Glenmoriston DMG (Lynda Campbell)</u> Glenmoriston is a newly formed independent Group having previously been part of South Ross DMG. Currently it has 11 estate members. There is a DMP in place that is being revised to take greater account of public interest. The Community Council is invited to Group meetings.</p> <p><u>2.13 Glenelg DMG</u> Lynda Campbell also reported on the Glenelg Group. Glenelg is a small Group with just 7 estates. The area is heavily impacted by walkers. Major winter mortality has been noted, and out of season shooting is also impacting on numbers. The existing DMP is being modified in the light of public interest requirements.</p> <p><u>2.14 South West Ross DMG (Shaun Macdonald)</u> The review of the DMP had been completed by Rory Puttman and is now awaiting sign-off by the Group. The deer population in the Group area is at an all time low and the local butcher's shop has closed. The Group is engaged with public interest aspects including tourism interests and is working with the Crofting Commission.</p>	
3.	<p>Comment from the Minister and discussion</p> <p>3.1 Due to constraints on her time the DMG reports were curtailed for the Minister to say a few words before departing. She said that she was very pleased to attend the meeting, and was interested to hear of the good progress being made, the different challenges faced and actions being taken. She was pleased to hear that Groups were engaging with Community Councils and their MSPs. She said she was keen to better understand the complexities of deer management and had met with both the ADMG Chairman and with BDS, and was hoping to meet LDNS separately.</p> <p>3.2 She said that there had been a lot of discussion on the public interest, damage to designated sites, and deer vehicle collisions, but understood that collaborative deer management was not always easy, with actions underpinned by the Code and the now reviewed and updated WDNA.</p> <p>3.3 She said there appeared to be good work happening on communications and transparency in line with what had come out of the RACCE Committee review. She acknowledged her commitment to the timetable of the review in 2016.</p> <p>3.4 She said that the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill was currently going through Stage 1, and an element of the Bill was that SNH would be able to require landowners to have a Deer Management Plan; also that an occupier had the responsibility to collaborate with their neighbours regarding deer management.</p>	

3.5 The Bill also contained new measures on deer panels and supporting and encouraging community engagement by Groups. Failure to cooperate would be subject to an increased penalty of £40,000 bringing this into line with other wildlife crime.

3.6 There was now support through the SRDP and the ECAF that had been developed with deer management and other related activity in mind.

3.7 The Chairman said that ADMG and its Member DMGs understood what was expected within the timescale concerned.

3.8 It was noted that it was not long until a decision would be made as to whether the voluntary principle would continue. RC asked whether the Scottish Government had considered what would happen if it was deemed unsatisfactory and what a regulated system would look like.

3.9 Andrew Taylor, Scottish Government, said it was important to wait for the outcome of the Review. If the voluntary principle was considered to have failed Ministers would require measures to be deployed rapidly in order to meet 2020 biodiversity targets, although there was no idea what form a regulated system would take at this stage.

3.10 Further discussion followed on what the potential 'pass rate' for the second round of assessments would be and whether assessment would be on production of a DMP or its implementation. Robbie Kernahan, SNH, said that the focus in the 2106 timescale had to be on having Plans in place, that they would take time to implement and be allowed to work. Post 2016 the focus will switch to delivery of the DMP actions.

3.11 There was also discussion on possible reliefs from sporting rates which the Minister said depended on the RACCE Committee recommendations and discussion yet to be had.

3.12 It was also noted that whilst promoting the public interest, ranging from access to army training to organised educational trips, and more, the pressure was still on DMGs to achieve cull targets. Many did not shoot at weekends at all. There was a plea to let stalking go undisturbed during sensitive periods and for Government to support *Heading for the Scottish Hills* as a vital communication tool for the sector.

3.13 The Chairman also expressed concerns about the Authorisations review and the time it was taking to get this in place.

The Minister left the meeting.

4.

DMG reports - continued

4.1 Monadhliaths DMG (Drew MacFarlane-Slack)

4.1.1 The draft DMP had been completed in Spring and was on the agenda at the August AGM. A community engagement day had been held for Community Councils, MSPs etc with representation of around 50. The community was very supportive of the Plan. Employment and environmental impacts were viewed as positive, and a positive message had been sent to the RACCE Committee.

4.1.2 A further public meeting is to be held in June 2016.

4.1.3 The DMP had received virtual unanimous approval, and the DMG's executive group had met and approved a draft of the new DMG constitution.

4.2 West Sutherland (David Allison)

There had been a positive meeting of the Assynt sub group. The 4 sub groups were each producing a DMP and meetings to discuss these were scheduled for end November.

4.3 NW Sutherland DMG

The DMP was due to be signed off in March 2016 and the next 6 months would begin to see its implementation.

4.4 East Sutherland DMG (Robbie Rowantree)

The Group has a mix of commercial forestry, renewables, crofting, agriculture and estate interests and a candidate world heritage site. The 3rd DMP for the Group is in production including a lot more on the public interest. It had to strike a balance between local geographical communities and 'global' communities of interest with a number of members working hard to excel. The Group was actively collaborating with the pilot SWARD project. It was reported that some of the smaller peripheral estates were 'resource-challenged'.

4.5 Affric and Kintail DMG (Willie Fraser)

The Group was producing its 3rd DMP – which would now be called an Integrated Management Plan. The Group has 7 landholdings, 5 owners and the new Plan is creating a lot of interest from forestry, sporting and conservation sectors. The best result will be a compromise and a deliverable plan.

4.6 Knoydart DMG (Sir Patrick Grant)

4.6.1 Stalking is the major interest in the DMG and socio-economically very important. There is also a lot of public access. The Group has a 'high quality stalking product' with the production of mature stags aged 8 to 10 years. The Group comprises private estates, FCS, the Knoydart Community Trust and JMT.

4.6.2 The stalking environment is challenging, deer numbers are low and the Group's relationship with SNH is good. The Group's 3rd DMP is being produced with the final draft due for delivery before Christmas.

4.7 Gairloch Conservation Unit (Seamus Macnally)

The Group has 7 estate members, an NNR, NTS, FES and a lot of crofting interest. Access is popular, but the Group has relatively few issues and its first DMP is due for completion in February.

4.8 Glen Strathfarrar (Frank Spencer-Nairn)

4.8.1 The Group is producing its third 5-year DMP. This will benefit from a helicopter count in the New Year. Reports from stalkers suggest the 2014 winter impacted heavily on calf numbers.

4.8.2 The Group has 9 members, and its information is on the ADMG website. Stalking has this year been good despite the weather, and a short rut. Most estates are meeting cull targets. The planned habitat survey has been postponed until 2016. In terms of public interest the Group area has hosted the World Orienteering Championships, MOD exercises, scouts, and the initiative to regenerate the Caledonian pine forest is ongoing. The Group is in regular contact with Strathglass Community Council.

4.9 Islay DMG (Donald Gillies)

The DMG consists of 120,000 acres and 8 estates. The DMG area is completely fenced. The 2nd draft of the DMP is now close to completion. There is a DMG meeting at end December and the DMP will be signed off by 31 March. Jamie Hammond, SNH, is producing maps, plans, plus habitat monitoring training. The community is engaged.

4.10 Jura DMG – in formation (David Gillies)

The Jura owners have met, are working well together, are forming a Group and will be putting a DMP together.

4.11 Mull DMG (note from HFO Bewsher)

Mull DMG has almost all estates and farms on the island engaged. The Group meets two times each year and its activities are published in the local newspaper. The DMP has been done, and the Group has its own website where the DMP can be accessed. An annual count will take place across all estates in the Spring. The Group has incorporated all provisions of the Benchmark.

4.12 Skye DMG

The Chairman said that a DMG on the Sleat Peninsula was in development.

	<p>4.13 Forest Enterprise Scotland (FES) Willie Lamont said that Groups all holding their meetings in October made it difficult for FES staff to cover them all, and that FES was involved with 15+ Groups. RC said that reducing the FES presence at DMG meetings was a concern.</p> <p><i>All regional reports being complete the Chairman then reverted to the original agenda.</i></p>	
5.	<p>Previous meeting, 29 July 2015, and minutes The report on the Regional Meeting at Mar Lodge on 29 July 2015 had been circulated and was on the ADMG website.</p>	
6.	<p>Chairman's report</p> <p>6.1 The Chairman said that he had little to add to the report that he had given as an introduction to the meeting for the Minister.</p> <p>6.2 He said that the political scene right now in relation to deer issues was all encompassing and that verbal and written evidence had been given to the RACCE Committee. He said that the opportunity to speak to the Minister at this meeting had helped to correct quite a lot of the misconceptions that had been put forward in the discussions of the RACCE Committee particularly those arising from the SNH report on the 2014 baseline DMG Assessment process which had been construed as a critique of the deer sector and did not do justice to the considerable progress being made as reflected in the preceding DMG reports.</p>	
7.	<p>Administrative Report The Secretary referred to the management accounts as at 31 October 2015. He said that ADMG was on target to meet its break even budget of £104,000. Income was however running slightly behind, at around £2500 adrift. Currently ADMG was ahead of budget however on expenditure by around £10,000 with almost £56,000 at the bank to cover the remainder of the subscription year to June 2016.</p>	
8.	<p>Current Business</p> <p>8.1 Agenda items <i>Land Reform Bill</i> and <i>Deer Management Planning Update</i> had been broadly covered already.</p> <p>8.2 In addition, RK advised that the ECAF grant scheme was now open until mid January. RC said that this funding could assist DMGs with delivery of activities; for example Habitat Impact Assessments could be supported by this fund.</p> <p>8.3 It was asked whether the ECAF could assist with footpath management. Donald Fraser, SNH, said that in principle ECAF could help with access provision, although properties might also already qualify for support under the SRDP.</p>	

	<p>8.4 There was discussion about the proposed new powers for SNH. It was broadly agreed that as a surgical measure rather than a 'blunt instrument' there could be no objection to SNH targeting those who were not complying or cooperating with the production and enacting of a DMP and thus holding back others in the sector. RK said the new powers could, as a last resort equally apply to overculling as to underculling. He said that a Control Order specified how many deer can be shot and deviation away from that would be an offence with an associated fine.</p> <p>8.5 RK said it remained a challenge, particularly in low ground areas, to encourage local authorities to 'step up'. SL&E confirmed their opposition to further powers for SNH stating that proposals for new legislation would be more appropriate after the DMG review rather than before it.</p> <p>8.6 It was noted that the Bill's Stage 1 process was into its final weeks and that members needed to engage with their MSPs and members of the RACCE Committee now.</p> <p><u>8.7 Communications</u> DP reported on progress on the deployment of individual websites for DMGs which would be funded by ADMG for the first year. The provision of material/information such as newsletters online rather than printed was acknowledged.</p> <p><u>8.8 Heading for the Scottish Hills</u> It was noted that some DMGs reported considerable interest from the public through the HFTSH site, and it was asked whether there were Government funds available to keep this service running. RK said that SNH was facing further budget cutbacks and further conversation was needed with ADMG to establish how the HFTSH online service could be delivered in future in the light of this. It was asked whether the service could be supported through SRDP funding.</p> <p><u>8.9 PACEC</u> FC said that the 2015 PACEC report was now at final draft stage, and that it had drawn on information from 200 participants accounting for 2 million Ha of deer range. It was hoped that the report would be finalised by the end of the year.</p>	
9.	<p>SNH report Much of the content of the SNH Assessment Report had been covered elsewhere in the meeting. In addition, attention was drawn to the Out of Season Authorisations Review in response to increasing concern about licenses being granted for out of season and for night shooting. RK said that the review still needed to be signed off by the Minister, and that it was not to review the legislation but to look at the SNH process in granting licenses. RC said that both ADMG and LDNS would be inputting to the review.</p>	

10.	Future dates <u>ADMG AGM</u> The date for the ADMG AGM was provisionally set for Friday 26 February at the Duke of Gordon Hotel, Kingussie, subject to availability of the venue.	

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