



## ASSOCIATION OF DEER MANAGEMENT GROUPS

### Regional Committee Meeting

Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> November 2016  
at Kingsmills Hotel, Inverness

## MINUTES

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### In attendance:

Richard Cooke  
Finlay Clark  
Helen Polley  
Lynda Campbell  
Julian Clark  
Victor Clements  
James Duncan Millar  
Alistair Gibson  
Willy Inglis  
Justin Irvine  
Pete Mayhew  
Ewen Macpherson  
Colin McClean  
John Morison  
Dick Playfair  
Linzi Seivwright  
Tom Turnbull  
Randal Wilson

Chairman  
Secretary  
Secretarial Support  
Executive Committee  
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Rod Andean  
Katrina Candy  
Tom Chetwynd  
Crispian Cook  
Mike Cottam  
Angus Davidson  
Philip Dean  
Holly Deary  
Roddie Feilden  
Donald Fraser  
Falcon Frost  
Martin Girvan

Bidwells  
Bidwells  
East Sutherland DMG  
North Ross DMG  
Cairngorm & Speyside DMG  
Angus Davidson Ltd  
Corrour Estate  
SNH  
Mid West DMG  
SNH  
Inveraray & Tyndrum DMG  
Glenmoriston DMG

Andrew Gordon  
 John Hay  
 David Lowes  
 Shaun Macdonald  
 Helen MacIntyre  
 Fiona Mackie  
 Seamus MacNally  
 Joanna Macpherson  
 Hamish Macrae  
 Gillian Pattinson  
 Mark Pattinson  
 Tom Richmond  
 Gordon Robertson  
 Donald Rowantree  
 Robbie Rowantree  
 Claudia Rowse  
 Lyndsay Sharp  
 Frank Spencer Nairn  
 Thomas Watson

West Grampian & Glenelg DMGs  
 South Mullardoch  
 Inveraray & Tyndrum DMG  
 Conon Brae  
 Inveraray & Tyndrum DMG  
 Glen Strathfarrar DMG  
 Gairloch Conservation Unit  
 Lochalsh DMG  
 Druidaig Estate  
 Lochcarron Estate  
 Lochcarron Estate  
 Savills  
 Assynt Foundation  
 Corrou Estate  
 East Sutherland DMG  
 SNH  
 Bidwells  
 Glen Strathfarrar DMG  
 Lochalsh DMG

<p><b>1.</b></p>	<p><b>Apologies</b></p> <table border="0"> <tr><td>James Adamson</td><td>Executive Committee</td></tr> <tr><td>Col. Bewsher</td><td>Executive Committee</td></tr> <tr><td>John Bruce</td><td>Executive Committee</td></tr> <tr><td>Bruce Sewell</td><td>Executive Committee</td></tr> <tr><td>William Jackson</td><td>Strathtay DMG</td></tr> <tr><td>Mark Nicolson</td><td>East Grampian DMG</td></tr> <tr><td>Julian Richmond-Watson</td><td>Glenelg DMG</td></tr> <tr><td>George Vestey</td><td>West Sutherland DMG</td></tr> <tr><td>Iain Wotherspoon</td><td>Glenlyon Estate</td></tr> <tr><td>William Galbraith</td><td>Associate Member</td></tr> <tr><td>Peter Keyser</td><td>Associate Member</td></tr> <tr><td>Hugh Morrison</td><td>Associate Member</td></tr> <tr><td>Hugh Rose</td><td>Associate Member</td></tr> <tr><td>Derek Stead</td><td>Associate Member</td></tr> <tr><td>Gilmour Strang</td><td>Associate Member</td></tr> <tr><td>Sandy Walker</td><td>Associate Member</td></tr> <tr><td>James Baillie</td><td></td></tr> </table>	James Adamson	Executive Committee	Col. Bewsher	Executive Committee	John Bruce	Executive Committee	Bruce Sewell	Executive Committee	William Jackson	Strathtay DMG	Mark Nicolson	East Grampian DMG	Julian Richmond-Watson	Glenelg DMG	George Vestey	West Sutherland DMG	Iain Wotherspoon	Glenlyon Estate	William Galbraith	Associate Member	Peter Keyser	Associate Member	Hugh Morrison	Associate Member	Hugh Rose	Associate Member	Derek Stead	Associate Member	Gilmour Strang	Associate Member	Sandy Walker	Associate Member	James Baillie		
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<p><b>2.</b></p>	<p><b>Minutes of previous meeting</b></p> <p>The minutes of the meeting held on 5<sup>th</sup> May 2016 were accepted as a true record of the meeting. Proposed by Tom Turnbull and seconded by Lynda Campbell.</p> <p><b>Matters arising:</b> Item 16 Stephen Gibbs had stood down as Chairman of the Scottish Venison Partnership (SVP) and Col. Bill Bewsher is the new Chairman.</p>																																			
<p><b>3.</b></p>	<p><b>Chairman's Report</b></p> <p><b>3.1</b> The Chairman commented on the changes in the political landscape since the election. In the new Government the SNP no longer have a majority and there are</p>																																			

	<p>now two cabinet secretaries involved with the rural sector instead of one minister. The ADMG had had constructive meetings with each of them; both appeared straightforward, forthright and receptive.</p> <p><b>3.2</b> The RACCE Committee has been replaced by the ECCLR (Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform) Committee. Membership of the new committee politically represents a wider balance of political parties with a number of new members including a new Convenor, Graeme Dey (formerly the Vice-Chair). The ADMG hoped for a more constructive dialogue with the re-formed Committee going forward.</p> <p><b>3.3</b> The ADMG had held a meeting in London for members based in the south who have difficulties attending meetings in Scotland. The meeting had been well attended. The Chairman had taken the opportunity to launch the ADMG fundraising campaign.</p> <p><b>3.4</b> Following the RACCE Committee and then Environment Minister's decision in 2014, that there would be a reappraisal of the deer sector in 2016, reassessments of all DMGs took place in May and June 2016. The results form a key part of the SNH Deer Management in Scotland Report to the Scottish Government published 18<sup>th</sup> November 2016.</p> <p><b>3.5</b> SNH gave evidence to the ECCLR committee on Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2016 and ADMG has been invited to attend on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2016 along with representatives from SLE, SGA, and LINK. The Chairman is preparing written evidence to submit to the Committee in advance.</p>	
<p><b>4.</b></p>	<p><b>Administrative Report/Management Accounts to 31<sup>st</sup> October 2016</b></p> <p>The Secretary commented on the accounts to 31<sup>st</sup> October 2016 noting that the financial year runs from 1<sup>st</sup> July to 30<sup>th</sup> June. The annual income budget was £116k and expenditure £111k.</p> <p>Total income to date was £51,943; a positive variance of £6,295. Income comprises largely of membership subscriptions and donations to the project fund. Membership subscriptions to date totalled £31,305 compared to a budget of £35k, slightly under budget, but the variance is due to to timing.</p> <p>Donations received for the Project Fund had been very encouraging. At the time of the Report the balance was £19,850, but this had now risen to just over £32k. (Please refer to item 5 b below).</p> <p>On expenditure, there were no major costs that had not been budgeted for. Expenditure was within budget except for newsletter costs which were £2,350; however, this is within the overall budget of £7,000 across the year.</p> <p>The Secretary reported that, overall there was a positive variance of £12,101 and he anticipated that there will be an increased balance at the end of the financial year. The ADMG holds funds of just over £93k which includes the £32k of project funding. The Secretary was content with the financial position and encouraged all to process invoices and cull returns promptly.</p>	
<p><b>5.</b></p>	<p><b>Current matters</b></p> <p><b>(a) 2016 Deer Sector Review</b></p> <p>The Chairman urged all to read the SNH "Deer Management in Scotland" Report (the Report) and confirmed that ADMG was not in agreement with it. The Chairman</p>	

welcomed Donald Fraser and Holly Deary from SNH, and Claudia Rowse, the Compiler of the Report.

The Chairman commented that ADMG had released an initial response to the Report in which it had commented on the disconnect between the conclusions, and the positive results confirmed in the content of the Report. In the Report, SNH had complimented both DMGs and the ADMG for their work, however the overall presentation and tone conveys a view that there is a crisis in the deer sector. Whilst further work is required, a great deal of progress has already been made. The Chairman was disappointed that headlines from the summary appear negative and defeatist. [SNH's conclusion is that: "*We are not confident that present approaches to deer management will be effective in sustaining and improving the natural heritage within a reasonable timescale...*"] Although the Report covers all of Scotland (not just DMG areas) and the statement is qualified by the stipulation of a "reasonable timescale" the overall message is that current deer management is failing.

Some DMGs had reported that they did not recognise the figures attributed to their DMG in terms of numbers in their DMPs (and agreed with SNH Wildlife Officers), and the numbers that were reported to be present. The Chairman asked DMGs where they did not understand or disagreed with what had been written generally, or about their DMG, they should bring this to the attention of SNH and ADMG. Points of correction should be properly addressed.

TT from I&T DMG reported that the deer population density they have been working to is half of the stated number in the Report. The population density in the DMP (and on the ground) is 8 deer per m<sup>2</sup> whereas the Report states between 12 and 16. Over 16 years, deer counts had shown no change in population density yet their reassessment had downgraded the DMG's position from green to orange.

DF reported that the information provided to JHI had come from SNH counts. JHI were carrying out an analysis and the Report contained some initial findings of estimated trends over time, using count data from 1960 to 2016.

I&T DMG reported that the Report's figure from 2016 confirms their red deer population density is 12-14 deer per km<sup>2</sup>. This had been shown as an absolute figure, not a trend. The Report's figure is twice that of the actual number.

Jl from JHI explained that the Report was based on modelling rather than on actual figures. Not all areas had been counted in every year, and the frequency of counts differed. JHI had tried to account for variations and were looking for trends to report on what was happening in different areas overall rather than a "national overall number". Jl stated that counts could never be entirely accurate and JHI had anticipated that the Report's predictions may differ from some DMGs' actual numbers. Jl confirmed he would be happy to hear from DMGs where there was a huge difference.

The Chairman acknowledged Jl's explanation but commented that, in respect of I&T DMG, the Report had published two absolute figures reflecting double the number of deer that had been counted on the ground.

TT confirmed that in addition to the incorrect figures, the I&T DMG area had a different profile of land use to the 1960s when there was no commercial timber. Count figures from the 1960s could not therefore, be compared like-for-like.

Jl responded that the JHI Report, being incomplete, had not yet assessed reasons for changes in trends.

TT asked how the graphs could represent trends between 2014 and 2016, but with double the number of deer reported than were on the ground. Why would a DMG

continue to count deer if their count figures were to be disregarded by SNH? HM commented that the intention of the Report was to establish the current situation in deer management, not on what trends are predicted over time. She felt that the report should not form the basis of the Government's decision on the future of deer management if it does not reflect the actual position.

The Chairman commented that I&T DMG was a model DMG that had made huge progress in a short time. He expressed concern that the margin of error may be repeated in other areas of the Report.

CR (SNH) confirmed that the finalised JHI Report would explain the methodology fully, but her understanding was that JHI will recommend a robust way of analysing data going forward. Although specific counts, in particular areas, differ from those shown in the model, future actual count numbers will begin to correct the model as the figures are fed in. The graph which shows the national 15 year trend, from which the headline figures have been taken, is the figure that the authors of the Report have confidence in. CR said that the best academics in the country had interrogated that figure, which is why it was used. Individual SNH counts will feed in to the model and the trend will be corrected over time.

CR was asked if SNH would be prepared to include in the Report, the fact that it contains a model which may be inaccurate, and which will be corrected over time to reflect the situation on the ground.

CR responded that SNH had not been asked and will not submit further evidence. SNH had reported the trend over the past 50 years, and this was important information not previously available, also that local impacts will continue to be important.

The Chairman summarised to the effect that that there had been a report prepared for SNH by JHI, but that, as this was not complete arguably it should not have been used as the basis of a Report which gives an impression of this and other DMGs, that they appear to have lost control over the deer population because the numbers shown have doubled in a few years. Although the theory may be sound, the discrepancy should be brought to the attention of Government. ADMG would have to do this, if SNH were unable to do so. The Chair asked DMGs who had concerns to let the Chairman have details and a portfolio will be collated to put before the ECCLR Committee in advance of the meeting on 13th December. DMGs should also make individual submissions on the report as evidence for the Committee.

MG commented that Glenmoriston DMG have carried out helicopter counts for a number of years and have a deer population of 9 per km<sup>2</sup>. However, the Report had included them within the South Ross Deer Group which has 5 different sub-groups. Glenmoriston DMG was now shown in a "red area", in contrast to neighbouring Affric & Kintail DMG with the same deer population number.

DF confirmed that the information in the Report was not to be used for deer management but was to show trends over time. The presentation of the Report followed the DMG framework, but he acknowledged there was variation between sub-groups and within DMGs.

The Chairman commented that this is unsatisfactory because the Report is a statement by SNH to Government of how they see the situation now, yet there are many inconsistencies between the information and locally observed situations on the ground. In short the Report is confusing and misleading.

CR said that they had reported a variable picture across the country and that even within DMGs there are variances and that it is a complex picture.

The Chairman replied that examples were being given that were wrong as reported in the meeting.

RR had read through the Report quickly and then focused on the conclusion. It gave the impression that the situation was unclear, that the socio-economic impacts are unknown, and the effect on the environment is questionable.

DR expressed concern that the scientific basis was seen as questionable and could be manipulated by either party.

The Chairman commented that the focus should be on deer impacts and the way forward is to concentrate on habitat condition by carrying out habitat impact assessments.

CC commented that those present at the meeting, and engaged in deer management, were struggling with the numbers reported. JHI had applied an analytical approach, but actual numbers were not reported. CC questioned whether MSPs would be able to differentiate between the numbers and the analysis before making decisions on deer management.

RC confirmed that he would include DMGs' concerns in the ADMG response to the ECCLR Committee.

VC reported that he had produced 6 DMPs and could see many mistakes in the Report. VC felt that there were sufficient errors to discredit the Report and that it was unfair to the JHI to publish the information without proper discussion and context. A Section 7 had applied to Breadalbane from 2010 to 2015. VC noted that the Report stated that the Section 7 had been extended for another year. This is incorrect. The Report states that Breadalbane DMG did not achieve the deer population levels set and did not achieve the required restoration of habitats. This has misrepresented the situation and has caused anger in the DMG. The Report contains misinformation that renders it discreditable.

RW reported on another DMG with a Section 7. The DMG had met population targets. Habitat assessments had been carried out in 2008, 2015 and again more recently, but no reports had been provided to the DMG. However the Group was being asked to reduce numbers further despite having a population less than had been set.

The Chairman confirmed he had heard from a number of Groups involved with Section 7 Agreements where their situation had been misrepresented. In all cases, the targets had been achieved, but there is a time lag before results are detectable in the environment.

In summary the Chairman observed that there are apparent issues surrounding the counts which are causing widespread concern and there are issues about the way Section 7 situations are being presented, which directs blame to the land managers, which they understandably feel to be unjust.

As the Report was already available to the public, the Chairman asked that SNH issue a statement to confirm that it had been brought to their attention that the Report had been published on the basis of incomplete work due to time constraints. Going forward it is essential that ADMG continue to work alongside SNH, but this Report has created a trust issue that was evident from the concerns expressed at the meeting.

CR responded on behalf of SNH, thanking all for their comments and inviting more detailed feedback. CR very much doubted that SNH would publish a new version of the report. A line had to be drawn at a certain point in time to assess the evidence



that was available from some of the most experienced wildlife managers, scientists, ecologists, and social scientists.

The task was complex, involving many variables but SNH had provided the best assessment of the evidence in front of them. CR confirmed she could explain the information considered to reach their underpinning conclusion. She apologized for the 1 or perhaps 5% SNH and ADMG disagree over, but she hoped that in time, 95% of the Report would be agreed and it was unfortunate that problems always attract the most attention. CR commented that the Report had confirmed that the DMGs were moving in the right direction. SNH had relied on an analysis of a jigsaw of information which created a picture that, in some places, deer continue to have a negative impact on the natural heritage which is why SNH's conclusion found that current approaches are unlikely to deliver the Government 2020 targets.

The Chairman commented that the proportion of the Report that ADMG would query was greater than 5% and that ADMG is concerned that the Report had been written to an agenda, which is that the deer sector is failing. He added that the people that SNH depend on to deliver deer management in the future and who continue to make progress, are the people who have read the Report, and have found themselves misrepresented and shown to be failing.

CR confirmed that SNH staff with experience of deer had contributed to the Report, and the Reports' authors had looked as objectively as possible at the evidence.

The Chairman requested that SNH, make a statement to Government that it had been brought to their attention that some of the facts in the Report were open to question.

CR repeated that SNH would not be submitting further evidence. She acknowledged ADMG's concerns and said that SNH wanted to continue to work with ADMG going forward.

The Chairman responded that the 2016 Review would result in a point of judgement by the Cabinet Secretary as to whether further measures are necessary. The decision would be misinformed as some statistics are incorrect.

The Secretary wished to put on record that the Chairman, himself as Secretary and LS on behalf of the ADMG and its member DMGs, took the trouble to meet with CR, DF and HD on several occasions before the Report was published. They had consistently underlined to SNH that the Report is extremely important to the deer industry and that the tone of the Report was absolutely critical. ADMG had offered to assist SNH in producing the Report that delivered on all fronts. While we had not expected to see the Report, which was confidential, ADMG had asked whether SNH thought the Report contained anything that would cause problems. SNH agreed that they would work with ADMG on this. Yet when the Report was published SNH were surprised at how much adverse reaction there had been. The Secretary could not see how SNH had failed to understand that the tone of the Report was crucial and at no point had SNH alerted them that it would conclude that the deer sector is failing.

CR said that SNH had met with ADMG and the environmental NGOs. The remit from Scottish Government had been that the Report should be SNH's evaluation. It was not to be produced as a collaboration with stakeholders. SNH had advised ADMG that while progress was encouraging there remain challenges for biodiversity. The Report is a fair and evidence based assessment but she acknowledged this was not ADMG's view.

The Secretary confirmed that in 2014 following the first assessments, the tenor of SNH was that they completely backed the voluntary principle and had confidence in

	<p>the deer industry to deliver on this. SNH secured £200k funding to enable DMGs to produce DMPs that would be fit for purpose from 2016 onwards and would deliver public interest objectives. Since 2014 SNH had confirmed that the DMGs had responded and had risen to the challenge, but now, in 2016, SNH report no confidence that the deer sector can deliver 2020 objectives. The Secretary asked that CR explain how the situation had changed.</p> <p>CR confirmed that SNH are still completely behind the principle of the voluntary approach and there has been no change in that. However the Report found that the evidence does not give them confidence that the voluntary system can deliver targets for the natural heritage. The Report had not stated that DMGs had failed, but had praised DMGs, this being one of the most positive elements of the Report. But the Report concerned all of Scotland whereas DMGs cover only 39%. It addressed more than red deer in the open deer range and aimed at delivering a national picture of what is happening with all species of deer throughout Scotland.</p> <p>The Chairman concluded that both ADMG and SNH had made their positions clear. The ADMG would welcome a retraction or qualification by SNH and that ADMG would put forward evidence to the Government on the failures of the Report.</p>	
	<p><b>b) 2016 DMG Assessment results</b></p> <p>Following the baseline assessment for all DMGs in 2014, reassessments carried out in May and June 2016 showed marked progress which had been acknowledged in the SNH Report.</p> <p>The Chairman noted that reassessments had been carried out under time pressure to deliver the SNH Report within 2016. Reassessments had coincided with a reorganisation within SNH so that local area managers were involved in the reassessments, and lack of continuity had resulted in some inconsistencies in the reassessments. The Land Reform Act had made provision for SNH to review the progress of the deer sector every three years and it may be therefore that the next reassessment will be in 2019.</p> <p>The Chairman commented that overall the process was useful in identifying areas requiring improvement and in recognition of good practice. Habitat monitoring is a top priority and the focus should be on deer impacts. DMGs need to demonstrate change in impacts on the natural heritage which will require DMGs putting habitat impact assessments in place. SNH have identified random sampling points and training is available. Habitat impact assessments must be implemented urgently, to demonstrate that targets are being met and habitats are improving. Damage from other animals and trampling damage should also be acknowledged.</p>	
	<p><b>(c) Land Reform Act and secondary legislation</b></p> <p>The Land Reform Act had been passed in the Spring. Secondary legislation to bring the Act into full force is now in the current Parliamentary program. Two areas relating to deer are already implemented (one) the introduction of sporting rates; (two) additional measures of intervention for SNH to require DMPs; and to set cull numbers in advance where collaborative management is failing. DMGs already comply with these requirements but if a DMG is not functioning properly then there may be a case for SNH to use the statutory backstops to the voluntary principle.</p>	



## **(d) DMG Communications**

### **Websites**

DP confirmed that at the SNH evidence session, the ECCLR Committee had incorrectly been told that there was no portal for access to find DMG websites. There are 35 DMPs on-line and publicly available now through the ADMG website. Many have been there for some time and DMGs have recognised that one of the best ways to communicate with the public is to have a website.

There are 38 DMGs on the web. Some that are missing may be Groups that may only exist in concept or have only recently been formed. DP reported that there were only 3 Groups that may need further encouragement to go online. Groups that do not have their own website can use a page on the ADMG website.

The ADMG had paid for all the websites for the first 12 months but DMGs will be required to pay £120 pa for hosting thereafter. Helen Polley will send a letter asking whether DMGs wish to renew the subscription via ADMG or if they would prefer to 'shop around' for a cheaper price. DP asked that DMGs do not allow the subscription to lapse as it is important to keep a public presence. He asked Groups if they chose to use another website, then to let DP have the link.

The Chairman commented that one of the top priorities set by the RACCE Committee was to improve communications and the availability of DMPs on the internet was a huge achievement.

**SQWV/SVP** JM confirmed that the PGI for Scottish Wild Venison is in progress. The "Eat Venison" day in September had received much press coverage. Simpson Game in Newtonmore had recently joined the scheme.

The FSS had found that the 2015 E.coli 157 outbreak had been caused by inadequate cooking of venison products and that Highland Game, who were the processor, were found to be "squeaky clean". SVP were also responding to FSS concerns by making "best practice" films available on You Tube about gralloching and deer larders. This will be funded by SVP, SQWV and hopefully FSS. SQWV have also responded to FSA's concerns by producing a new set of standards in 2017. SQWV have recommended that stalkers undertake a food hygiene course once every 5 years.

The Chairman commented that should there be another outbreak of E.coli he FSA could respond by closing the market down.

JM commented that SQWV membership encompassed between 70 and 75% of the volume of venison produced, but the remaining 25% is unmonitored. JM urged all deer managers to join the scheme and to use a reputable producer with SQWV membership.

The Chairman was asked whether the FSA had provided data regarding the prevalence of E.coli 157 in the field, as this had been requested at the AGM.

DP commented that the data does not exist and that FSA had written a proposal for the research to be carried out. The anticipated cost would be £100k. The research

	<p>will depend on deer managers providing swabs for testing for E.coli 157, cryptosporidium, and CWD.</p> <p>DP advised that FSS now have an operational policing unit and all should be encouraged to report bad practice. DP would circulate details in e-Scope.</p> <p>The Chairman understood that there had been 5 cases of CWD in reindeer in southern Norway, but that they were aged animals and a distinction had been drawn between CWD that may be endemic in a population for generations and the effect on “naïve” populations such as in North America where the effect is far more devastating. Although it is not an immediate threat, precautions should remain in place.</p>	
	<p><b>(e) Sporting Rates</b></p> <p>The Chairman confirmed that legislation on Sporting Rates had been passed and would be introduced in March 2017. Questionnaires have been circulated and must be completed. Regional Assessors had consulted with ADMG and SLE about the wording of the questions, however, the questionnaire was lengthy. The definition of Sporting Rates that are being assessed concern the rental value per subject as let to a tenant who is bearing all of the costs, i.e. it is the bare land sporting rights rental value. ADMG had recommended that the assessment be on the basis of a statutory formula rather than on the basis of bags and/or revenue as had been the case historically.</p> <p>The Assessors are an independent professional body who were robust when they appeared before RACCE when they insisted that small landholdings and crofts require to be assessed in terms of the legislation. The Chairman estimated that there are c. 50,000 subjects to be assessed whereas in the past, assessments were just focused on sporting estates (around 8,000 subjects). This assessment was being carried out in addition to a review of all business rates in Scotland. Sporting Rates’ questionnaires must be returned within 14 days. However the Assessors were realistic about the time required to complete the forms. The Chairman urged that the questionnaires be fully completed and returned as soon as possible, but if this would take in excess of 14 days, then to let the Assessors know.</p> <p>The Chairman drew attention to the box at the back of the questionnaire that asks for “other factors” that might be relevant to the assessment. This relates to an amendment by Mike Russell MSP that consideration and possibly some allowance should be given where the property in question is participating in a DMG with a DMP. The Small Business Bonus Scheme means that those whose rateable value is less than £10,000 (£15,000 from 2017) will be exempt under current Scottish Government policy. Many larger sporting properties, including some deer forests, will be likely to be required to pay rates. It would be helpful to ADMG if DMGs could provide feedback on the process and discussions with the Assessors, and if in doubt about assessments be prepared to submit appeals. When an Estate accepts an assessment this can act as a precedent for the Assessors in negotiating the assessments of others. Whatever figures may emerge, the cost of Sporting Rates will be a new extra cost against deer management.</p>	
	<p><b>(f) Project Fund</b></p> <p>The Chairman confirmed that this had been launched at the ADMG London meeting. Just over £32k had been raised so far and the target was double this figure. Funds</p>	

	<p>were being raised separately to subscriptions so that ADMG could partially fund projects such as Best Practice and SWARD that SNH could no longer fund fully. The SWARD data system is needed to analyse habitat impact data and cull numbers, to provide information for DMPs. There have been discussions concerning how to make Best Practice Guides less expensive. There are plans to produce some of the Guides on You Tube.</p> <p>The Chairman thanked all those that had made donations and particularly thanked the artist Ian MacGillivray who had donated a painting to sell. This had raised an additional £7,000 for the fund.</p> <p>The Chairman asked everyone to canvas support and further donations which would enable ADMG to move projects forward.</p>	
<p><b>6.</b></p>	<p><b>SNH Update</b></p> <p>DF confirmed that SNH staff would continue to support deer management and the focus should now be on delivery of the DMP action plans. Going forward, whatever conclusions are reached by Scottish Government, it is important that DMPs are delivered and SNH will continue to support DMGs as much as possible with on-going projects.</p> <p>The Chairman confirmed that despite SNH's Report findings affecting confidence and trust, relationships with SNH wildlife officers remain positive.</p> <p>Regarding the Authorisations Review, the Chairman observed that the forestry lobby had convinced the Panel that there was a need for increased out of season and night authorisations as a means of managing deer when necessary, instead of these being measures of last resort.</p> <p>DF confirmed that the Panel had acknowledged the importance of managing deer particularly in woodland, but that sporting interests had been considered too. The Panel had recommended that more information be made available to land managers so that the process was more open and objective.</p> <p>DF confirmed that there was a count programme planned for 2017 including west Grampian.</p> <p>CR was asked what the position was with regard to the 3 yearly review in terms of the Land Reform Act as to whether the deer code was working in practice and whether DMPs were being delivered.. CR confirmed that SNH had not yet made plans but that the next review would take place in 3 years' time.</p>	
<p><b>7.</b></p>	<p><b>DMG Reports and local issues</b></p> <p>The Chairman asked whether there were any particular issues that DMGs would like to raise.</p> <p>VC advised that there had been a recent meeting in Dunkeld to discuss setting up a new DMG. This had been well attended by representatives of estates, farmers, the Chair of the local community council as well as Iain Hope representing SNH. The main focus of this Group would be fallow deer. The Chairman commented that an LDG approach may be more appropriate.</p>	
<p><b>8.</b></p>	<p><b>AOB</b></p> <p>FSN asked about the Scottish Agricultural Colleges project to identify areas for future research. The Chairman confirmed that the interim findings had identified useful</p>	

	<p>areas for research that would be relevant to DMGs. (See Executive Committee Minutes, Chairman’s Report). FSN asked whether there were resources available to fund research projects to help deliver Government policy. He noted the difficulty experienced by some DMGs due to public access and asked whether Government might recommend some areas be avoided during week days during the culling season so that deer population objectives could be delivered. Deer management is being undermined by access rights in some areas.</p> <p>LS asked whether resources would be made available to deliver DMPs. In 2016, DMGs could apply for ECAF and two Groups were successful although funding had not yet appeared. Would ECAF funding be available going forward?</p> <p>CR was uncertain when this would be decided, but the matter was receiving urgent attention. CR agreed with the Chairman that DMGs were being asked to deliver more but with less funding.</p> <p>JM Asked about woodland expansion. Scottish Government were around 17 months behind with payments, which was adversely affecting managers of woodland. VC noted that there appeared to be a hiatus in funding due to increased bureaucracy and complex processes.</p> <p>CR confirmed that the cabinet minister had held a number of Forestry Summits, and was aware of the failure of the I.T. system which was causing delay.</p> <p><b>Birnam Seminars</b></p> <p>Once the Cabinet Secretary has announced any decision on conclusion of the Review, ADMG intends to hold a Birnam seminar for Chairmen and Secretaries. Habitat reassessments will be one of the topics covered.</p>	
<p><b>9.</b></p>	<p><b>Date for AGM</b></p> <p>The AGM is provisionally planned for 8<sup>th</sup> March 2017. Roseanna Cunningham had been invited to speak at the meeting</p>	
	<p>There being no other business the Chairman closed the meeting with thanks to all for attending.</p>	