

SUGGESTED SPEAKING NOTE – ADMG PARLIAMENTARY RECEPTION

Introduction

- I am delighted to be here and would like to thank you Stewart for hosting this event.
- I would also like to thank the Association of Deer Management Groups for supporting the event and all of you for taking time to be here tonight. I'm pleased to see representatives from so many Groups in attendance.

Context

- When I took up this post as Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment in 2018 I was aware that deer management has been a long-running issue in the land management of Scotland.
- There seemed to be fairly entrenched views on the part of deer managers and also of conservationists, who are often very critical of the way deer are managed in Scotland.
- However as I have become familiar with the issue in more detail - and this has been helped by the mini flood of reports we have had on deer management recently – from the Scottish Gamekeepers Association, from LINK, from ADMG, from SNH and of course from the independent Deer Working Group – it has become clear to me that there is a more complex and evolving picture here.
- There is no doubt that considerable progress has been made with Deer Management Plans, habitat assessment,

training for recreational stalkers, and protection of the public interest generally.

- But at the same time, we are all aware that more remains to be done, and beyond that we face a growing challenge with climate change
- Ensuring not only that our natural environment is resilient, but also recognising that it needs to play a major part in tackling climate change through nature-based solutions such as tree-planting and peatland restoration
- You will all be very aware of the importance of effective deer management in ensuring the success of those two key elements of our climate change mitigation policy.

Climate Change – Forestry

- Our Climate Change Plan sets out ambitious woodland creation targets, aiming to increase woodland cover to 21% of the total area of Scotland by 2032.
- In 2018-19 we exceeded our annual target and planted over 11,000 hectares, which was 84% of all woodland created in the UK in that period.
- But we cannot stop there, in the coming year alone we have set out our commitment to planting 12,000 hectares of woodland and forestry, that's equivalent to planting over 20 million new trees, alongside providing additional funding to important projects addressing this crisis.

- Scotland's new woodlands are helping to respond to the global climate emergency and to enhance biodiversity.
- They will also deliver a range of other benefits to the environment, economy and people, including producing timber which can be used as a carbon-negative construction material, and providing recreational and restorative spaces for people to enjoy.
- Their creation is underpinned by the internationally recognised principles of Sustainable Forest Management and the principle of the right tree, in the right place, for the right purpose.

Climate Change – Peatland restoration

- Our Climate Change Plan also recognises the important role peatland restoration, can play in responding to the global climate emergency and also in delivering what the Committee on Climate Change describe as 'co-benefits' such as improved water quality and also improved biodiversity.
- We have announced £20 million in the draft budget for 2020/21, which will result in significant restoration activity leading to reduced carbon emissions from degraded peat.
- This, together with the commitment to invest more than £250 million in peatland restoration over the next ten years,

sends a strong and clear signal of our commitment to substantially enhancing our efforts on peatland restoration.

- This will enable large-scale restoration projects to be developed, enhancing biodiversity, supporting jobs in the rural economy and delivering significant greenhouse gas emission reductions.
- To-date, challenges such as weather impacts and contractor capacity have played a significant role in what can be delivered from year-to-year but almost 20,000 hectares of degraded peatland have been restored since the project started in 2012.
- We continue to review the approach to delivering peatland restoration, to ensure we maximise efficiencies and continue to increase rates of restoration.

Role of deer management in woodland and peatland restoration

- So from that brief account of what we are doing on woodland and peatland restoration I hope you will appreciate the extent to which these are key elements of our work on climate change.
- We expect to achieve these changes in a landscape in which deer remain an iconic part of Scottish wildlife, a key sporting and economic resource, and a contributor to our biodiversity.

- We know that sporting businesses and recreational stalking will remain a key part of deer management, as well as culling and the use of deer fences where appropriate.

Association of Deer Management Groups

- We are very clear that collaboration through Deer Management Groups will continue to be vital in achieving deer management objectives.
- The Association of Deer Management Groups is very active in promoting best practice and working across the sector to build relationships, and communicate the importance of deer management in protecting habitats and managing land.
- I would like to thank Richard Cooke in his role as Chair, alongside the rest of the executive committee of the Association of Deer Management Groups. The Association brings together many interests within the deer sector, encompassing different views and perspectives and providing opportunity for discussion to take place.
- These opportunities for collaboration and joined up ways of working have never been so important.
- I'm well aware of the significant levels of resource, and enthusiasm and high levels of expertise in those concerned with deer management in Scotland, within both the professional deer managers and the recreational stalkers.

- Without this resource, there is no doubt that the job could not be done and we depend on you for delivering effective and sustainable deer management across Scotland.

Deer report

- As you'll all be aware we recently published an independent report on the management of wild deer in Scotland by the Deer Working Group, which we published last month.
- The report, which we commissioned in 2017, sets out recommendations to ensure deer management puts the public interest at the heart of decision making whilst continuing to advocate sustainability and diversity of our wild landscape.
- The Group was initially chaired by Simon Pepper, but after his very sad and untimely passing, Andrew Barbour stepped in as Acting Chair.
- It's important to recognise what a significant undertaking this was. The final report makes 99 recommendations to improve deer management across Scotland and recognises the significant challenges we face in managing wild deer.
- Whilst it does not recommend a complete change to the basis of the current deer management system, and the principles of a voluntary system remain, it does make many

recommendations for legislative changes that amount to an overhaul of the Deer Act.

- Given the number of detailed recommendations and our current legislative agenda it's unlikely we'll be able to bring forward a Bill this parliamentary year. This will allow us additional time to give careful and mature consideration to the Reports contents.
- It will also allow plenty of opportunity for all those with a view on deer management to ensure their voices are heard long before any legislation is brought before the Parliament

Benefits of deer

- Whilst the Report makes many recommendations for change, it's also important to recognise the benefits deer can bring.
- We want to focus on maximising these benefits – including economic and social benefits to rural communities as well as increased biodiversity, venison and bringing nature closer to people.
- There is considerable potential from both wild and farmed deer in Scotland to contribute to the economy, the Venison sector represents an iconic image of Scotland and is one of our unique resources.
- Over the last few years people have become more aware of the health benefits of venison. Venison is a low calorie

meat high in protein, iron and vitamin B12 which is fantastic nutrient for our red blood cells.

- The venison sector action plan - Beyond the Glen - seeks to realise this potential to increase the production and consumption of Scottish venison.
- Beyond the Glen sets out a number of actions to help grow the Venison sector in Scotland whilst recognising the mechanisms that already exist to allow the supply of venison to local markets.
- Beyond the Glen sets out the ambition to make Scottish Venison the premier choice of consumers and commercial buyers, both here in the UK and in international markets. by 2030.
- This is supported by three aims to sustainably maximise the market growth potential for: wild venison by ensuring full value from the 3,500 tonnes culled annually; farmed venison by substantially increasing the farm sector output to 850 tonnes and growing the value from £540,000 to £4.6 million; and innovation through collaboration between those in both the wild and farmed sector by utilising the strengths of the venison supply chain, such as local processing facilities, licensed venison dealers and local outlets.
- We will continue to working in partnership with the sector to take forward actions to meet these ambitious targets

and ensure we continue to benefit from this unique resource.

1514 words @ 170wpm = 8.9 mins

