

## **The Cost of Building DMG Capacity**

### **1. Introduction:**

When I was conscripted into delivering a talk on “Building Capacity” I must admit that I undertook some research to double check that my understanding of the phrase was correct - luckily, it was!

For those of you, who like me are sometimes a little uncertain on such definitions, “Building Capacity” is the process by which individuals and organizations obtain, improve, and retain the skills, knowledge, tools, equipment and other resources needed to do their jobs competently or to a greater capacity.

Through this presentation, I will show how some of the individuals and groups within the deer management sector, which undoubtedly has the skills and knowledge to deliver sound collaborative deer management, are adapting to secure resources and to meet the challenges, demands and scrutiny that are focusing on their valuable contribution to the Scottish environment.

In terms of deer management groups, we only have to look back 5 years to see, that in 2014, there were approximately 35 DMGs in existence throughout Scotland. We are now at the point where there are 45 DMGs in addition to a number of informal Working Groups covering much of Scotland and the numbers are continuing to grow as additional areas, particularly the Islands, join in.

Up until 5 years ago, it was normal for a DMG to comprise a Chair, operating on a voluntary basis and a Secretary, who would undertake the administration, often in return for a modest financial contribution. Between them they would organise up to 2 meetings per annum running to an agenda focusing on a range of traditional matters of direct relevance to the group.

How times have changed!

## **2. Period of Change**

In the last five years, as we are all aware, the deer industry has come under increasing political scrutiny with 2 government reviews of the sector undertaken to date and a third on its way.

The groups in existence now represent a far more complex range of interests and are developing in to a robust and sound structure for the delivery of adaptive deer management at both a landscape scale and national level.

All now have written Deer Management or Working Plans as well as schedules, population models and maps to enable decision making and delivery of the agreed plan. These documents not only cover the principles of deer management but also the delivery of public interest actions and are all relevant to the operation of the group if they are to deliver the increasingly diverse objectives of the individual members on a fair and equitable basis and meet the standards expected from the government reviews.

## **3. New Structures**

### **3.1 Members**

The vital component of all DMGs is the membership, who's role and responsibilities within a DMG has and is continuing to change significantly.

Whereas 10 years ago, some members possibly didn't fully engage with their DMG, the majority probably now do and their involvement ranges beyond routine deer management to include HIA monitoring, the delivery of designated sites into favourable condition, the protection and expansion of woodlands, peatland restoration, as well as the sound management of the shared resource to ensure that welfare is taken into account at both the individual animal and population level.

In other words, they are increasingly responsible for the delivery of a wide range of public interest actions on the ground and are now expected to deliver data and contribute to discussions at 4 - 6 meetings per annum as well as attending courses in first aid, quad bike, argo and other machinery operations, all in order to meet mandatory training and competence requirements.

### **3.2 The Chair**

It is important to remember that these DMGs continue to operate voluntarily and under the direction of a committee, generally with the same Chair, offering increasing amounts of their time on a pro-bono basis.

These personalities have often been the first to adapt to changes in land management objectives and government policy and to change their approach to leading a DMG. Whereas their involvement previously would possibly have been in the region of 3 – 5 days per annum, the demand on their time can now often be up to 10 days, sometimes more.

As well as bi-annual DMG meetings, Chairs are now often expected to chair Steering Group or Practitioner Meetings, attend ADMG workshops and meetings of neighbouring DMGs. They are also often called in to engage with local communities and to undertake conflict resolution, all again at their own personal cost. They have come up to speed on population models, HIA and public interest actions, none of which would have featured on a meeting agenda 10 years ago. The contribution made by Chairs, particularly in terms of time, is significant and vital to the successful operation of a DMG and the delivery of deer management at all levels.

### **3.3 Secretaries**

In the case of Secretaries, their role is crucial and has changed too given they are now called on to provide increasing administrative support and often the finance function to DMGs. Not only are they producing minutes, but they are now also collecting cull data, HIA data and liaising with members over annual counts, in addition to updating websites and, in some cases producing annual reports for publication in local and regional magazines.

### **3.4 Facilitator**

A more recent development for some DMGs has been the appointment of an External Facilitator or Consultant, also often the DMP author. The role of the Facilitator is to help lead the DMG through the increasingly demanding expectations of Scottish Government and to analyse and interpret data and information collected by the group to ensure that it continues to function satisfactorily.

In particular, Facilitators are now preparing new and updated maps, providing input on population models and collating HIA results on behalf of DMGs as well

as preparing Habitat Impact Assessment Reports. Most importantly, they are playing a crucial role in the presentation of data for the DMG Assessment process.

### **3.5 Steering Groups**

Some DMGs have taken steps to form Steering Groups or hold specific Practitioner / Stalker meetings where an agenda is discussed, often in a more focused and less formal environment. The purpose of these meetings is to agree and co-ordinate the actions required by the DMG and executive decisions are increasingly made and reported to the wider membership at the main DMG meetings. This again requires additional input from the Committee, the members elected to attend and the Facilitator.

## **4. The Cost**

It is important to recognise that DMGs are all now providing a significant resource in terms of skill, knowledge, expertise and commitment, not to mention manpower, in the increasingly demanding delivery of collaborative deer management and public interest actions. There is often a lot of work being undertaken by the various parties behind the scenes to ensure that meetings are arranged, and work is planned and undertaken in a manner that provides the best outcome for the group in an increasingly challenging environment.

It is not surprising that the increasing workload and reliance on outside assistance leads to an increase in costs for DMGs and questions as to “How will this be financed?” and “Who will meet the cost?” have often been asked.

Although there has been the proposal to provide funding for DMGs through schemes such as EACCAF in the past, there is currently no public funding for DMG operations or the delivery of some public interest actions and DMGs are financed through an agreed budget and membership subscriptions. The annual budgets for DMGs are steadily increasing as they continue to ensure that deer management is undertaken to industry standards and having been involved in this transitional period for two DMGs, these costs are still generally both manageable and realistic when the range of benefits derived from building capacity are considered.

In the case of these DMGs, both of which have consented to being referred to today, they were operating on a standard budget that included the ADMG levy and a combination of meeting room and secretarial costs. However, both have

now recognised that although they have both the capacity and some of the expertise required to deliver effective deer management, they require additional input, in particular, with the delivery of public interest actions.

They have also agreed that their operation is best delivered by a combination of two full group and two steering group or practitioner meetings per annum and that a group level population model is required. This is regularly updated as agreed when their DMP was signed off and, following the collection of data from the first and second year of the HIA cycle, they are now preparing their first Habitat Impact Assessment report, kick-started with some assistance provided through one-off funding from SNH.

Excluding the annual ADMG levy, the additional costs to these groups in acquiring external expertise has been accepted and is in the region of £2 – 5,000 per group per annum, depending on the nature of the projects being undertaken. Not surprisingly, however, some members have commented that these levels show a 100 -200% increase on what was previously paid in terms of DMG subscriptions. When considering an explanation to this, there are often several ways of analysing and potentially allocating these costs such as on an area basis or cost per hind culled.

## **5. Analysis of Costs**

Whereas I do not intend to go into specific detail, one group historically bore the cost of a secretary, meeting and management costs which amounted to approximately £2,000 per annum or, on a flat rate basis, £130 per member, this in addition to the ADMG levy.

With the run up to the ADMG Health Check last year, it was quickly recognised that various areas of the DMP, which I should point was 50% funded by SNH, had not been addressed and that a different approach to the running of the group was required. As a result, the structure of the group changed from a single group to 3 separate sub-groups, which suited the deer population, geographical layout and the management objectives of the various parties within each sub-group.

A working plan was commissioned to summarise the key elements of the DMP, a habitat monitoring programme adopted and a population model produced, all to inform management decisions taken by the group. The cost of these elements, in addition to an element of community liaison lead to a one-off increase of £4,200 in the annual management costs of the group. Inevitably

there was some teeth sucking when this figure was first proposed but when it was explained that the additional cost could be allocated on the basis of £17 - 18 per hind shot, there was general acceptance that the additional cost of building on existing knowledge and skills and engaging additional resources to deliver the DMP was reasonable.

Interestingly, in this case, one party quite rightly continued to challenge the concept and costs of building capacity. It was explained following further analysis that the overall cost of operating the DMG as a whole had risen by 3p per acre and would drop back the following year once the initial work had been undertaken and systems put in place, the matter was accepted.

## **6. Benefits of Incurring Cost in Building DMG Capacity**

If DMGs and their membership are strengthened in terms of increased knowledge and greater confidence through investment in the operation and delivery of deer management plans, I would suggest that can only be a good outcome in an era of greater public scrutiny.

As the more traditional approach to deer management changes, often through advances in technology and specialist skills, practitioners within DMGs, with their wealth of knowledge and experience should take every opportunity to move with the times and obtain, improve and retain skills, knowledge and other resources needed to do their jobs competently and to greater capacity.

It is easy to forget that the deer management sector has come a long way and whereas some of the costs currently incurred appear considerable when compared to historic costs, they are a small price to pay to maintain the voluntary system that is currently in place.