

Association of Deer Management Groups
Regional Meeting
Alladale Wilderness Reserve, Ardgay, Sutherland
7 August 2019

In Attendance

Richard Cooke	Chairman
Tom Turnbull	Vice Chair
Linzi Seivwright	Executive Committee
Tom Chetwynd	Executive Committee
Victor Clements	Executive Committee
Falcon Frost	Executive Committee
Robbie Rowantree	Executive Committee
Rory Putman	Executive Committee
Joanna Macpherson	Attadale DMG
Gordon Robertson	Easter Ross DMG
Patrick Creasey	North Ross DMG
Frank Spencer-Nairn	Glenstrathfarrar DMG
Hugh Nicol	Inveraray and Tyndrum DMG
Russel Cooper	FLS
Tom Cameron	FLS
James Hall	Croick Estate
Seamus MacNally	NTS Torridon/Gairloch Conservation Unit
Charlotte Gilfillan	North Ross DMG
Kirsty MacDonald	Highland Game
Innes MacNeill	North Ross DMG
David Campbell	North Ross DMG, East Ross DMG
Donald Fraser	SNH
Holly Deary	SNH
Sinclair Coghill	SNH
Megan Rowland	SLE
Ron Smith	South Perthshire DMG
Thomas Watson	Attadale Estate
Rhys Llewellyn	Scottish Woodlands
David Allison	North West Sutherland DMG, West Sutherland DMG
Mark Seligman	Strathbraan Estate

1. Apologies

Apologies had been received from: Finlay Clark, James Adamson, Lynda Campbell, Alistair Gibson, David Gillies, Dick Playfair and Randal Wilson – all Executive Committee.

Also: James Baillie – Glen Shiel, Ken Bowlt – West Ross DMG, Claire Foot-Turner – RSPB, Darrell Stevens – RSPB, Stewart Gillies – MoD, Iain Robertson – MoD, Michael Laing – Glenelg DMG, David Lowes – Glenfalloch, Bella Lowes – Glenfalloch, Susanna Thomson – Black Mount DMG, Ian McMynn – SSE, Christian Nissen – Highland Game, Roddy McAskill – Highland Hill and Habitat Solutions, and Associate Members Bill Cowie, Peter Keyser, Gilmour Strang and Iain Thornber.

2. Minutes from Regional Meeting held 05 June 2019 and Matters Arising.

- No matters arising from the minutes
- Proposed, VC
- Seconded, RC

3. Chairman's Update

- RC asked that his thanks be communicated to Paul Lister, owner of Alladale Wilderness Reserve for the use of Alladale Lodge and the tour of Alladale Wilderness Reserve that afternoon.
- There has been a lot going on over the last year leading up to the SNH assessment of DMGs, now complete, the overall SNH review of the deer sector and the Deer Working Group (DWG) review of the system of deer management in Scotland. Both SNH and DWG are due to report to Ministers in September and their reports will be published in due course thereafter. The last stage of the three-year review by the ECCLR Committee may take place around the turn of the year and any actions in terms of decisions by the Cabinet Secretary or any proposals for new legislation would follow in due course.
- RC tabled the newly issued ADMG report on the SNH 2019 DMG Assessments. A copy was provided for each attendee and the report will be circulated to all DMGs following the meeting. RC thanked VC for compiling this report and LS for the analysis of the results.
- The majority of DMGs had reported that the SNH assessment process was fair and had improved from 2016.
- ADMG had met frequently with SNH over the past three years in order to ensure clarity and consistency in the 2019 Assessments and it is hoped that the SNH report will be well aligned with ADMG's analysis of the progress made by DMGs.
- ADMG will shortly be circulating to DMGs a questionnaire seeking feedback on the Assessment process and other matters.
- ADMG is aware of the increased expenditure involved in deer management and will include a question on this in the questionnaire as this will be an important point to make during the latter stages of the review indicating the commitment of those within the deer sector to invest in self-improvement.
- RC also commented that a small number of Groups are now referring to their DMPs as "land management plans" indicating a more comprehensive and integrated approach which covers not only deer management in isolation but all aspects of land use, recognising that most properties have a range of management interests.

4. Administrative Report

a. Management Accounts to the End of June 2019

- RC went through the management accounts for the year to 30.6.19 and the budget to 30.6.20 noting that as deer numbers appear to have peaked and are now on a downward trend, as indicated by the JHI report to SNH in 2017, subscriptions to ADMG are likely to decline over a period.
- At this early stage in the year ADMG is currently running under budget.
- ADMG is trying to increase the number of Associate Members. There are currently around 100.

4. Future Work Plan and meetings attended

a. Feedback on DMG assessments

- DMGs would be invited to comment individually on their experience of the Assessments under DMG Reports later in the meeting.

b. Sporting Rates

- RC reported that most appeals were being dealt with informally and that a pragmatic approach was being taken by the assessors. It is understood that allowances, generally up to 30%, will be made for disadvantages such as disturbance, lack of infrastructure and remoteness.
- HN asked whether there were any allowances being made for being a member of a DMG. RC advised that it was certainly worth mentioning this in negotiations as it relates directly to an amendment achieved by ADMG during the passage of the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill in 2016 which allows Assessors to take account of “other matters”.
- RS asked whether all of the assessments had now been issued. RC stated that this was unclear with information on all landholdings not being available to the Assessors. It is not known whether there will be a *de minimis* size of landholding to be assessed.
- Many properties will, under current arrangements, qualify for 100% relief under the Small Business Bonus Scheme for rateable values of up to £15,000 or 25% relief for RVs between £15,000 and £18,000.
- TC said that he has dealt with 4 negotiations now and had been able to agree reduction of all 4 cases to within the Small Business Bonus Relief bracket.

c. Venison

- Dick Playfair had provided a briefing paper on the venison industry.
- NZ imports have decreased dramatically with other markets proving more attractive.
- It is unclear whether post Brexit imports and exports will contract. KM of Highland Game mentioned that the tariff implications associated with Brexit were unclear. It was also unclear if the roe deer market, still largely export, was likely to change. RC asked whether there was a demand for wild boar, KM outlined the complications with processing boar but once these were overcome it was a good product.
- It seems that the increasing number of deer farms has yet to have implications for the wild venison sector but that currently the price offered for farmed venison exceeded that for wild venison.

With the industry expanding it is likely that most females will be marketed as breeding stock in the shorter term.

- RR asked why a decreasing volume of venison produced and a reduction in imports did not result in an increased venison price.
- DC asked whether the UK is a net exporter or importer of red venison. It was understood that import volumes represented about a quarter of the red venison sold in the UK and that exports, mainly stag venison to Europe, amounted to a similar tonnage.

d. Meetings attended

- RC listed the meetings attended over recent months on behalf of ADMG members.

5. SNH Update

- DF outlined the process involved with the SNH assessments and how that would be presented to the Cabinet Secretary in the autumn, coinciding with presentation of the DWG report.
- Aspects that would be covered in the SNH review include The Code of Practice on Deer Management and lowland deer management as well as a summary of the recent DMG Assessments and an update on the Section 7 agreements of which there are now five.
- The draft SNH report will be passed to SNH senior management within the next week and then to the SNH Board before it is presented to the Cabinet Secretary at the end of September.
- ADMG and Scottish Environment LINK had met with SNH to help promote a constructive dialogue in the future.
- SNH is continuing to work on the Current Section 7 agreements as well as work on projects such as the Flanders Moss reduction cull.
- SNH will continue to support DMGs.
- SNH has been undertaking work on the socio-economic impact of DMGs and work on SWARD will be continued, both in conjunction with ADMG.
- SNH is keen for the current momentum of DMGs to continue and DF highlighted the importance of keeping DMG websites updated.
- RC asked DF if the number of Section 7 Agreements is likely to continue to drop (9 down to 5 since 2016), particularly when most DMGs have effective population models in place. DF agrees that this is the direction of travel but also said that Section 7s could be used in a variety of new ways, for example in the lowlands.
- RC stated that the cycle of 3 yearly SNH reviews was sometimes detrimental to DMGs and that a greater gap between reviews might be beneficial. DF stated that this was under discussion.
- DA wanted to bring to the attention of SNH the detrimental effect of the Cape Wrath Trail and the impacts of public access generally in managing deer populations.

6. Publications and PR

- RC underlined the importance of reading e-Scope in keeping up to date at a busy time.
- RC stated that ADMG intends to be more effective in communicating with members and that the 2018 Annual Review would be repeated as an annual publication, alongside 2 issues of Scope. It is essential that DMGs pass on relevant publications to all their members.

- ADMG is to hold a Parliamentary reception at Holyrood on 11th December.

7. **DMG Reports**

22 DMGs were represented at the meeting. They reported individually as follows:

- **Cowal Deer Working Group.** TT reported that all the Groups in Area 6, for which he is ADMG regional representative, had performed well in the recent Assessments and that the new CDWG was progressing but was hampered by having a large number of potential members (130) and by the high percentage of forestry land in Cowal. CDWG experience will be important going forward as there are many similar areas where deer populations have flourished in commercial forestry.
- **South West Ross DMG.** TC reported that the Group was doing well, and that the Assessment outcome had been good.
- **East Sutherland DMG.** TC reported that the Assessment process had been slightly more challenging here but that it had been fair. It was reported that there had been increased community engagement and engagement with school groups.
- **North West Sutherland DMG.** TC reported that the Assessment had been more difficult and that in an effort to improve this it had been agreed that there would be four meetings a year and that the stalkers group would meet twice per year. The stalkers meetings were more informal but had proved very useful. DA reported that the Assessment had been a fair reflection of the Group and would help focus minds and he thanked TC for his contribution to the Group as its temporary Chair on behalf of ADMG.
- **Balquhiddier DMG.** FF stated that he thought that the Assessment process had been very fair and that they had a very good working relationship with their WMO. BDMG has benefitted considerably from having employed a secretary to administer the Group.
- **Lochalsh DMG.** JM said that LDMG is a small group which operates well and that the Assessment result had been good. Developing a population model for this Group has proved difficult but support was being provided by SNH.
- **Easter Ross DMG.** GR reported that there have been differing opinions on management among the members. The DMG hosted a 'Hill to Grill' BBQ for local children which had been a big success, and this is likely to be repeated in the future.
- **North Ross DMG.** PC said that the Group had had a fair Assessment but that improvements needed to be made. A comprehensive HIA exercise was being carried out by a consultant this year. There have been considerable complications over the Beinn Dearg Section 7 agreement and negotiations with SNH are ongoing about the signing of a new Section 7 agreement over a wider area to take in the whole catchment for the deer on the SAC. The Group is now setting up three sub groups to take things forward more effectively at local scale.
- **Breadalbane DMG.** VC stated that the Assessment had been fair and that the Group now needs to focus on HIAs. Foot counts and HIAs would be undertaken in alternate years going forward. The Section 7 in BDMG concluded in 2015 but the range of habitats within the Group areas throws up some management problems which the Group needs to address.
- **East Loch Shiel DMG.** VC said that this Group had put in a lot of work and that the exceptional progress was reflected in the Assessment.
- **Northern DMG.** VC will be providing this Group with a habitat management plan going forward.

- **Assynt DMG.** VC reported that the Assynt Crofters intend to challenge the continuation of the SAC designation on the Ardvar Woods following a recent independent report to SNH which found that the number of oaks is insufficient to justify designation as Atlantic Oak Wood. It remains to be seen how this is to be progressed.
- **Gairloch Conservation Unit.** SM reported that the assessment had been ok. He voiced concern over the increased costs of operating the DMG, with expenditure increasing by 3 to 4 times over recent years.
- **Alladale Estate.** IM thought that with public access continuing to increase DMGs would need to give more attention to the effects of disturbance and consequent habitat impacts in the future.
- **BDS.** RP mentioned that, following the concerns over access and deer management BDS would be supporting the Glen Lyon work on the effects of access on deer. ADMG is also a funding supporter of this project.
- **South Perthshire DMG.** RS said that the Group had had a realistic Assessment. Several training days would be held on HIA.
- **West Ross DMG.** MS reports that the Group had been operating well but that it could be difficult to get owners to attend DMG meetings.
- **Inveraray and Tyndrum DMG.** HN stated that the group would focus on Native Woodlands following group wide HIA and peatland feasibility studies. HN thought that peatland restoration would be a matter for individual landowners rather than being planned at Group level. Concerns were raised over the future of sheep farming in the area.
- **Glenstrathfarrar DMG.** FSN was happy with the Group Assessment and commended the contribution of the WMO. The Group has applied for a Forestry Cooperation Grant. It looks forward to the scheduled helicopter count which will aid population modelling after 2017/18 winter mortality.
- **Uist DMG, Harris and Lewis DMG.** LS reported that community based DMGs were struggling to count and undertake some usual Group practices due to a lack of resources. She pointed out that there could be potential funding to communities for DMG work from windfarms.
- **Affric and Kintail DMG.** LS said that a lot had been achieved in this DMG. The Group now refers to its DMP as a Land Management Plan reflecting the scope of issues that the DMG now covers.

8. Meeting Dates

- 21 November 2019 Regional Meeting in Inverness
- 26 February 2020 AGM, Drumossie