



## **A Declaration for Upland Deer Management**

After 6 May we will have a new Scottish Government and new members of the Scottish Parliament.

Deer management is complex and affects much of Scotland – upland deer, their habitat and the people who manage them are the principal concerns of the Association of Deer Management Groups (ADMG) and its Deer Management Group (DMG) membership. 50 DMGs cover in excess of 3 million hectares – that's almost half of Scotland. Their remit extends far beyond deer, embracing many associated upland issues and increasingly supports delivery of national and global commitments and targets. There are positive and negative aspects to our wild deer requiring a balance to be struck in their management.

DMGs are making good progress. The Cabinet Secretary, responding to the Deer Working Group (DWG) report, said: *"I am very grateful for the work of the Deer Management Groups who have collaborated, assessed impacts, planned and put plans into effect over the period. I must also mention the gamekeepers, gillies and other deer managers, both professional and recreational, who have worked hard to make plans a reality."*

For our new and returning MSPs here are six short messages.

### Seasons and deer welfare

We want our deer herd to be in the best health possible. To achieve that it must be managed. The current system and the structure of close seasons safeguards this priority. Whilst out-of-season culling is permissible under certain conditions it is important it is granted for exceptional circumstances only. Skilled deer managers will use their judgement and ADMG strongly advocates that all management should continue to take place within the current seasons structure wherever possible. Best Practice and a professional approach are paramount.

### Deer impacts and culls

Ongoing NatureScot helicopter counts, DMG foot counts and academic research have shown that open range red deer numbers now average <10/sq km, below the target specified in the DWG report, with an estimated population of some 300,000 red deer. ADMG will continue to encourage its membership to maintain that level or less but impacts of other herbivores – sheep (which outnumber deer 2:1), hill cattle, hares, rabbits, and feral goats – must be taken into account too. Annual culls are planned with and reported to NatureScot as normal practice and part of Deer Management Plans. A mandatory cull approval system for the setting of culls across the upland range managed by DMGs, whilst recommended by the DWG, is unnecessary.

### Collaborative management and delivery at scale

Collaborative management works. The DMG system embodies this, with collaboration and consensus at its heart. The DMG structure, and the voluntary principle that underpins it, are not only delivering deer management at landscape scale but much else in addition. As expectations for what DMGs can deliver in the public interest have increased DMGs have risen to that challenge. The Scottish Government response to the DWG report says: *“We recognise the strengths that the existing collaborative DMG structure delivers and the benefits this brings to many communities.”*

### Supporting the green agenda and climate change targets

Could another system be as effective in delivering Scotland’s climate and biodiversity targets for new woodland planting, restoring native woodland and peatland restoration? DMGs are well aware of these targets and their role in their delivery. They know they are a vital part of the solution and are already delivering woodland expansion and peatland recovery on a wide scale. Publicly available Deer Management Plans highlight the work DMGs are doing in response to the climate emergency.

### Working in the wider public interest

The NatureScot assessment process has placed DMGs under considerable scrutiny over the last six years and their capability in delivering against the broadest set of public interest criteria has been reviewed three times. Management to limit road traffic accidents, to address rising concerns about tick-borne disease, and furthering our understanding of deer health in relation to safe, healthy food are all examples of joined-up, coordinated deer management working at scale and depth to deliver the public interest.

### Underpinning the rural economy

The rural economy too has taken a hammering through the covid pandemic but, under normal circumstances, deer management contributes £35.4m in operating expenditure annually, offset by £12.5m in revenue, as well as providing more than 2,500 jobs in our remotest areas. Deer management related tourism, both high-end and affordable, is a necessary source of funding for deer management related employment. The safe supply of venison to market is crucial as is expanding future venison markets. All these aspects are vital elements of the upland deer management process.

ADMG and the DMGs will work with the next Scottish Government to continue to deliver on the above. We are asking for the trust and the confidence of those who will make future decisions that affect our sector to allow us to continue to do our job, in collaboration with others from across a whole spectrum of management objectives, for the benefit of future generations, and for our deer.

Richard Cooke  
Chair  
Association of Deer Management Groups

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