

1. Key Messages for DMGs

The future management of the Scottish Uplands has a key role in helping to meet key Scottish Government targets, through the restoration of carbon rich and wider habitats and woodland creation. Deer management will be an essential component of these actions and ADMG recognises the valuable role that voluntary DMGs will have in underpinning successful outcomes. ADMG is also aware that the period ahead may require some Groups to adapt in response to different priorities and while that may present challenges for some, there may also be opportunities.

In order to provide the right organisational support to DMGs, ADMG has identified three key areas of focus:

- **Maintaining momentum** in delivery of deer management, through use of information to set and deliver appropriate culls and achieve population targets.
- **Providing support and capacity building to DMGs** through the provision of information, support, guidance, and training Identifying opportunities to strengthen collaboration.
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Maintaining Momentum

- It is important not to lose sight of the progress that has already been made by DMGs. Going forward it will be vital to concentrate on the fundamentals of deer management planning including, population modelling, delivering on agreed culls, Habitat Impact Assessments and deer counting to continue the important work that has already been undertaken.
- We are under increased pressure to reduce deer numbers, particularly in those areas where densities are higher than 10 deer per sq km. NatureScot are more than aware of those DMGS above this figure and members are asked to consider carefully those densities at the higher end.

Providing Support and Capacity Building

- ADMG is inviting suggestions on any support measures which would be useful to help DMGs meet the challenges ahead. This could be guidance, workshops or specific training. A full programme of workshops and meetings is currently being scoped for Spring 2023 and early feedback on topics of interest would be helpful.

Strengthening Collaboration

- ADMG has become aware that some DMG meetings can, on occasion, be a negative experience for those attending. Whilst appreciating that discussions may be emotive and feelings can run high, there is no place within DMGs for aggressive or dismissive language and no one should come away from a meeting feeling intimidated or that they can no longer attend. We must all remember that DMG meetings are attended voluntarily by those that have an interest in managing deer collaboratively.

- ADMG is asking all DMG members to maintain respectful conversations at all times. This places a lot of importance on DMG Chairs and the office bearers to maintain sensible constructive conversations at all times, providing those present the opportunity to air their opinions in a calm way. All DMG Chairs are being encouraged to bring to the attention of ADMG, any situations where discourse might be improved. If anyone attends a DMG meeting and they feel that they were not treated appropriately, please raise with ADMG as a matter of urgency.
- All DMGs are encouraged to find positive, meaningful ways of engaging with local communities. As a minimum, all Groups should keep websites up to date including minutes of meetings but DMGs should also consider other opportunities to engage constructively with communities and schools for example through estate events. Often there will be local funding sources to help pay for items such as minibus hire etc. if required.

2. ADMG Programme Ahead

Strategic Deer Board

- We are at an important stage in the future of deer management in Scotland. We face the introduction of the 92 accepted recommendations of the Deer Working Group Report and must ensure that deer managers are in the strongest position possible to tackle the challenges of the future.
- The Strategic Deer Board (SDB) is comprised of senior officials from the government agencies and has been set up to oversee the implementation of the Deer Working Group Recommendations under four workstreams, Legislative, Regulation, Incentive and Operational Delivery.
- It is likely that any of the primary changes to deer legislation will be tied up within a new Natural Environment Bill. In the meantime, recommendations requiring changes to secondary legislation may be progressed in the shorter term.
- ADMG have written to the SDB requesting further contribution as the representative of a great many stakeholders. Our paper outlined the positive work that is taking place across the Highlands and the role that DMGs will play into the future. ADMG members are uniquely positioned to meet ambitious government targets and indeed they have already risen to a great many challenges. A top-down approach to deer management that doesn't consider those that will ultimately deliver the targets, is unlikely to work. We hope to be engaged to a greater extent going forward.

Events

- **Regional Meeting:** This will be held virtually on the **Tuesday 6th December at 5pm**. Contact Clare Irving (clare.irving@bidwells.co.uk) to register attendance.
- **ADMG AGM.** Provisionally this will be held at Kingsmills Hotel, Inverness on **Wednesday 22nd March 2023**.
- **Spring Workshops:** A series of workshops will be arranged for Spring 2023 to include peatland restoration, riparian woodland and thermal-drone census.

ADMG projects

- **DMG Health Checks.** In light of the DWG recommendations, NatureScot no longer requires periodic DMG Assessments but many DMGs have come to value a structured internal review process. ADMG is therefore developing a simplified voluntary Deer Management Group Health Check approach to enable Groups to monitor their own progress against a range of practical parameters and is scoping arrangements for this to take place in Spring 2023. The purpose will be to support DMGs in delivering collaborative deer management to meet future challenges. Further details in the new year.
- **DeerMap.** ADMG is supporting the development of a predictive mapping tool for deer managers to better understand deer movements and distribution at a landscape scale.
- **Finding the Common Ground.** ADMG and Environment LINK have joined forces to take forward a year-long project which will aim to break down barriers in deer management through civic mediation. A recent two-day workshop at the University of Stirling provided a thoroughly constructive atmosphere where 40 deer and land managers from a variety of backgrounds, including for the first time for some, farming, forestry and community interests, to vocalise the challenges that they face in collaboration and some heartfelt truths were expressed. Further activities will be organised to include more stakeholders over the next year.

Access

ADMG continue to liaise with the National Access Forum and Mountaineering Scotland. It is hoped that going forward good working relationships will enable us to communicate the concerns of our membership and develop ways in which we can improve the situation on the ground. ADMG welcomes feedback on issues concerning Groups.

3. ADMG Activity Update

Consultations

- ADMG has made responses to two major consultations recently: Scotland's Biodiversity Consultation and the Land Reform in a Net Zero Nation consultation, which is still open for submissions until 31st October.
- Whilst fully supportive of the new targets for nature in Scotland: halting biodiversity loss in Scotland by 2030 and regenerating biodiversity across Scotland by 2045, ADMG felt that the consultation had failed to recognise the following:
 - That considerable work has already been undertaken by many land managers in improving biodiversity.
 - Red deer populations are generally static or decreasing across the upland red deer range and this has been acknowledged by NatureScot over several years.
 - The contribution of sheep and other herbivores and the frustratingly divergent Scottish Government policies on livestock and deer.

- ADMG have concerns that the Land Reform consultation lacks evidence that large scale land ownership has any negative impacts. ADMG included the following points:
 - Large-scale landholdings should not be seen as a negative but as an opportunity to deliver the sort of change desired in the biodiversity strategy.
 - A voluntary Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement would still enable much positive work to take place but a legal duty to do so would only add another layer of bureaucracy inhibiting positive change.
 - Many of the 'large scale' landowners are currently members of existing DMGs and the proposal to publish Land Management Plans would in effect duplicate our already published Deer Management Plans, again place another layer of administration onto land managers already under pressure to deliver net zero targets.

Scottish Venison Association

- By the end of the stags in mid-October it was evident from some quarters that there are capacity issues in collection and processing that are hampering the uplift of carcasses. SVA will be taking a detailed look at the situation and considering measures that may be needed going forward to remedy this. In the meantime, please ensure that you liaise with your local game dealer/s to make them aware of the scale and timing of proposed hind culls, to enable them to forward plan.
- SAOS is currently undertaking an internal review of SVA structure and financing and also to identify whether there are opportunities/benefits for 'streamlining' SQWV and SVA.
- SVA pitched for and received £60,000 in Government funding through the Scotland Food and Drink Partnership (SFD) Covid Recovery Campaign to support the sector with an online promotional campaign in 2021. SVA continues to receive valuable UK venison market intelligence through The Knowledge Hub, funded by SFD.
- SVA launched a Statement of Intent in July with regard to achieving carbon net zero across the Scottish venison industry by 2035 and will be progressing this through commissioned research and an action plan over the coming months.
- SVA is coordinating a project, with funding through SFD, to pilot development of three new local chills/processing points for wild venison in north Argyll, Dumfries & Galloway and Moray.
- With Scottish Craft Butchers/Craft Skills Scotland SVA is exploring staging venison butchery workshops for deer managers and stalkers with the opportunity to supply 'own label' venison products and to develop local markets.

Meetings

- ADMG has recently met twice with Lorna Slater, Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity, including a day at Glenfalloch Estate as part of the Finding the Common Ground project. We were able to convey our concerns for the future of deer management and discuss the importance of collaboration.
- A Scotland's Moorland Forum event provided an opportunity to meet Mairi McAllan Minister for Environment and Land Reform to talk about many aspects of moorland management.
- ADMG continues to liaise regularly with NatureScot and with FLS and we sit on a number of boards and Forums that enable us to engage land managers across a number of areas.