

1. Natural Environment (Scotland) Act

The Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill was introduced by the Scottish Government on 19 February 2025. The Bill was passed by the Parliament on 29th January 2026 and received Royal Assent on 12th March 2026. Part 4 of the [Act](#) makes changes to the Deer (Scotland) Act 1996. ADMG will produce more detailed guidance on the main changes to the Deer Act and an expected timetable, in particular where secondary legislation will be required to be in place before some of the changes come into play. In the meantime, the main changes to note are:

- The addition of a new power of intervention (Section 6ZB) for the purposes of preserving, protecting, restoring, enhancing or otherwise improving the natural heritage or environment.
- A revised Code of Practice on Deer Management (Section 5A) which will set out the circumstances in which NatureScot may intervene in the management or control of deer.
- Introduction of a new Right to Request Action (Section 7A) where a person may request NatureScot to exercise its functions if they believe that damage is occurring, and that person is, or is likely to be, directly affected.
- Creation of a Register of Authorised Persons (17A): anyone shooting deer unaccompanied, especially under specific authorizations (e.g., in the closed season or at night), will require to be considered "fit and competent" by NatureScot. Further consultation will be undertaken before it comes into play.
- Changes to the rights of an occupier or grazings committee to prevent damage by deer (Section 26, 26ZA and 26ZB). These changes will require further consultation and it is expected that exercise of rights under sections 26 and 26ZA (and any regulations made under section 26ZB) will be set out in the code of practice on deer management. Furthermore, the occupier must have reasonable grounds to believe that the taking or killing of deer is necessary to prevent damage or injury to livestock or they will be committing an offence.

It has been an extremely challenging 12 months for ADMG as the various stages of the Bill have progressed. ADMG involvement has included:

- On-going engagement with the Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity Jim Fairlie MSP, also providing an opportunity for him to get out onto an estate and experience practical deer management
- Representation at several Rural Affairs and Islands Committee (RAIC) meetings
- Detailed consultation responses
- Meetings with NatureScot and other stakeholders
- Working with the Minister, members of the RAI Committee and Scottish Government representatives to put forward amendments at Stage 2 and 3.

2. Meetings

The 2026 ADMG AGM was held on Wednesday 25th March at Kingsmills Hotel, Inverness. A transcript and audio recording of the meeting will be available on the ADMG website.

3. SBBS

ADMG met with Jim Fairlie MSP to discuss significant concerns over the Scottish Government's decision to withdraw the Small Business Bonus Scheme relief for deer management which is set to take effect from April 2026. ADMG's interpretation and that of the Minister and his officials is broadly as we have expressed in previous communications that secondary legislation will permit for an exception where deer management is undertaken for environmental purposes and the venison enters the human food chain. However, the interpretation of the Local Authorities remains crucial. As we understand, guidance has been issued to Local Authorities and ADMG is keen to ensure a consistent approach is being undertaken across regions.

ADMG is asking that those deer management and venison businesses that receive returns and demands for payment of non-domestic rates and that have previously been exempt through SBBS to forward this information to ADMG so that it can be evaluated and passed to Scottish Government officials.

4. ADMG Programme Ahead

There will be a workshop for DMG Chairs on 17th June 2026 at the Strathdearn Community Hub, Tomatin at 10am – 3.30pm. This will be an opportunity to discuss next steps for DMGs following the introduction of Natural Environment Act.

Contact Helen Macintyre to register (projects@admg.scot).

5. Scottish Venison

A full-on period of activity for a revamped organisation that has now brought together the Scottish venison sector's representative body SVA and the quality mark SQWV as one entity, Scottish Venison Ltd. Activity has included the launch of a new identity coupled with a new consumer-facing website www.scottish-venison.com, significant ongoing consumer engagement through social media channels Instagram, FB and X and the launch of an online newsletter accelerating growth of Scottish venison's online presence. Scottish Venison has been engaged in increasing penetration into the public sector and wholesale channels, promoting local processing and local markets, developing venison initiatives in the classroom, sponsorship of the cookery theatre at the Scottish Game Fair, and working with partners SAOS, NatureScot and LDNS to deliver infrastructure grants for small low ground projects.

A revitalised and resourced SQWV continues to grow its producer scheme, has launched a brand licensing scheme for AGHEs, and is working up an accreditation scheme and quality mark for smaller processors.

Politically Scottish Venison has been fully engaged through the Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill process with Ministers, the RAI Committee, and MSPs with achieving a buoyant venison market a definite cross-party ambition, resulting in venison featuring on the face of the new Deer Management and Venison Plan as well as in a number of other aspects of the Bill/Act.

6. Common Ground Forum

The Common Ground Forum is in need of funding to continue its important work – to make a donation, please contact info@thecommongroundforum.scot or find out more at <https://thecommongroundforum.scot/>.