

Moidart Deer Management Group
Minutes of the Meeting
Slatach, Glenfinnan, Wednesday 16 May 2018, 4 pm

Present: Colin Surman, Roshven, Jane Cheape, Glenaladale, Patrick Lees-Millais, Glenmoidart, Suzanne Stevens, Lochshiel, Iain Macaskill, Glenmoidart, Gordon Shankland, Lochshiel, David McCauley, Glenaladale, John MacDonald, Glenuig and Eilean Shona, Hugh Cheape (in the chair).

Welcome: the chair welcomed those attending the Meeting.

Apologies: apologies were received from Alistair Forbes, Colin Lees-Millais, Nino Stewart, David Stewart Howitt, Robert Clegg, Tim Leslie and David Brennan.

Minutes and Matters Arising: the Minutes of the MDMG Meeting of 21 August 2017 were tabled. For matters arising, all items were carried forward on the Agenda except peatland restoration; this procedure is supported by funding from the Scottish Government's 'Climate Change Agenda' and should be given further consideration. The chair reported that he was following this up and recommended members individually to consider undertaking a peatland restoration programme.

Moidart Deer Count 2018: the chair thanked the Group and all involved for the very successful outcome of the recent foot-count of the peninsula. The count totals were Stags 675, Hinds 1148, Calves 357. The work accounted for 41 man-days. For comparison, the 2016 SNH helicopter count totals were Stags 693, Hinds 1224, Calves 375. The totals have been circulated in table form. Initial doubts in February over the viability of a count in prevailing circumstances of a serious incidence of natural mortality had been thoroughly discussed and advice sought from neighbouring deer groups, ADMG and SNH, in particular from Graeme Taylor. Failure to carry out a count this year would have made it difficult to achieve a count before the 2019 re-assessment and could seriously prejudice the Group's standing. In discussion, the shortage of mature stags was highlighted, and the presence of numbers of young stags suggested that more consideration should now be given to culling across the age range. The DMP population model going forward towards a productive balance between stags and hinds indicates a population of 780-800 stags. A reduction in hind numbers is still required and it was generally acknowledged that, given the terrain and prevailing weather patterns, this was a challenge. The cull figures for 2017-2018 are not yet complete but it was suggested that a reduction in the Moidart stag cull in 2018-2019 should be in the order of 15-20 stags. This needs to be adopted by the Group and the chair agreed that as soon as the 2017-2018 figures are complete, he would circulate these with the proposal that members should offer a *pro rata* contribution to this reduction.

Scottish Deer Health Survey 2017-18: the chair reported that, as he understood the situation, the survey by the Moredun Research Institute was still ongoing and that further

samples would be welcomed. He asked Group members to take sample boxes since the Institute had delivered a further supply.

Association of Deer Management Groups: the chair reported that he and the secretary had attended the re-scheduled ADMG AGM in Aviemore on 22 March 2018. The ADMG Chairman's Report outlined the progress made in the preparation of DMPs towards effective deer management and in support of the 'voluntary principle', and updated the meeting on SNH's reporting to the Scottish Government on their working criteria for the protection of public interest and promotion of sustainable deer management. The Cabinet Secretary's response referred to an increased use of regulatory powers by SNH to ensure delivery of effective collaborative deer management in the public interest across Scotland. The AGM had talks from Dr Peter Mayhew, CNPA, on 'Natural Capital', from Dr Linzi Seivwright, ADMG/Consultant, on the 2019 Review, and from Winston Churchill on a career in deer management and sporting rates.

SNH Habitat Training and Support: the chair reported that SNH has made grants of £1,800 available to Deer Management Groups for Habitat Impact Assessment [HIA] training and support, and that this sum had been applied for on behalf of MDMG. The sum is to be applied to a contractor while MDMG's contribution is to be in time and effort. The chair and secretary met with Dr Cathy Mayne of Mountain Environment Services on 19 February 2018 and agreed in outline how a training and support procedure could be set up. This has all been communicated to the Group including Dr Mayne's 'Proposal Document', and *nem. con.* and with Dr Mayne's agreement, the training event has been fixed for 25-26 June in the form of the first day as 'training' and the second day as 'fieldwork' in which a perceived 'gap' in the Moidart assessment plots could be filled; this is an area in the west end of Kinlochmoidart ground. The chair will be updating the briefing and arrangements for this.

Deer Management Plans reassessment 2019: the chair informed the meeting about SNH's reassessment of DMPs beginning in March 2019 and asked for full support from the Group. This will be a relatively intense process requiring contributions from all members, in particular for the population model, agreement on cull targets, HIA and the benchmarking of Public Interest criteria.

Any other business: some discussion was had on Sporting Rates and the chair offered to write on behalf of John MacDonald's appeal against a crippling assessment.

Date of next meeting: the date Tuesday 21 August 2018 was agreed although it was suggested that, in future, a second meeting should be held after the stag season when there would be issues of substance to discuss; therefore the next after autumn meeting should be in October/November 2019. There being no further business, the chair thanked those attending for their time and the meeting closed at 6 pm.