

Moidart Deer Management Group
Minutes of the Meeting
Slatach, Glenfinnan, 18 May 2016, 5 pm

Present: Colin Lees Millais, Glenmoidart, Suzanne Stevens, Loch Shiel, Nino Stewart, Kinlochmoidart, Alistair Forbes, Roshven, Jane Cheape, Glenaladale, Ronald Cheape, Glenaladale, Hugh Cheape, Glenaladale (in the chair).

Apologies: apologies were received from Robert Clegg, Glenuig.

Minutes: the minutes of the last meeting of 17 August 2015 were discussed.

Matters arising: the chair raised the question of radios as ongoing and requiring resolution. Tim Leslie had forwarded a link to Scottish Communications Group in Perth and it was agreed that this should be pursued and a check made of competitive pricing. A formal thanks was mooted on behalf of the MDMG to the chair and team for the assembling and completion of the Deer Management Plan [DMP] in a timely manner and to an appropriately professional standard. The chair reported that the DMP had been well-received by SNH who had inferred that it compared well with DMPs produced by 'professional consultants'. He reported on meetings with SNH on 22 April and 17 May 2016 as part of a re-assessment procedure with DMGs to ensure delivery of the public interest and that it appears that the MDMG is more or less fulfilling the criteria; the results of this procedure will be submitted to the government's RACCE Committee in October 2016. The opportunity was taken to remind the Meeting that the 'public interest' is equated with the current condition of designated sites, especially woodland.

Deer Count: the meeting reviewed the SNH deer count of Moidart carried out by helicopter on 10 February 2016. The chair expressed the thanks of the meeting to those members of the MDMG who had assisted with the count and the meeting concluded that the consistency of the deer population total with last year's and earlier 'foot count' totals was reassuring and a vindication of traditional methodology and local expertise. The RDC count of 1994 offers a favourable and useful comparison, showing a relatively stable population with stag numbers up and hind numbers down. A MDMG 2016 'Density Map' from SNH had been circulated and the point was made that its significance lay in the total figure rather than distribution.

Deer population and culls: the chair asked the meeting to consider the prevailing emphasis within the public domain on designated sites and deer pressure, suggesting that a reduction of overall red deer population must still be considered. He pointed out that any advantage accruing from the completion of the DMP would be lost as growth of numbers would be shown to increase impact and damage on SSSIs and woodland. It was agreed that the MDMG should aim to reduce red deer density towards 8/km² in Moidart and concentrate on an increased hind cull. Discussion included the implications for overall deer numbers in the development of 'long-term forest plans'.

Target and actions: the chair drew the attention of the meeting to the concluding section of the DMP specifying targets and actions. These offered measurable criteria for the effectiveness of a DMP and it had been made clear that these would be monitored by SNH. The chair explained that the process of preparing the MDMG DMP (including scrutinising other DMPs) suggested that a limited number of achievable targets should be proposed for 2015-2020, and these were, seriatim, cull targets, environmental monitoring, fuller DMG participation, training policy and skills audit, venison marketing, maximisation of economic benefits (eg. local venison marketing), data for economic costs of deer impacts, effective communication on deer management issues and deer mortality record keeping. The chair asked for the support of MDMG members to achieve these targets and it was agreed that responsibilities would be shared out amongst members and the outcomes added to the DMP. Alistair Forbes agreed to set up a record of red deer mortality.

Administration and governance: the chair suggested that there should be a change in governance to reflect the present circumstances of accountability. He suggested that the chair should circulate annually or bi-annually among all members and that there should be a 'permanent secretariat' remunerated by the MDMG. After considerable discussion, it was agreed that the chair and secretary should continue in post for the present but that the members would take on particular responsibilities to support these roles. In the interests of good governance it was agreed to adhere to a programme of an 'annual general meeting' (with expectation of wider participation) and two further meetings (of landholders and of manager/stalkers) which might usefully be held on the same day. Colin Lees Millais agreed to chair this latter meeting for MDMG.

Any other business: given that there was no other competent business, the chair thanked members for their attendance and the meeting closed at 6.30 pm.

Date of next meeting: a provisional date was agreed for the next meeting to be on Monday 22 August 2016.