

Moidart Deer Management Group
Minutes of the Meeting
Slatach, Glenfinnan, Monday 21 August 2017, 4 pm

Present: Patrick Lees Millais, Glenmoidart, Nino Stewart, Kinlochmoidart, John MacAulay, Dalilea, Gordon Shankland, Lochshiel, David McCauley, Glenaladale, John Jackson, FCS, Dave Brennan, Lochailort, Lynda Campbell, ADMG, Robert Clegg, Glenuig, Suzanne Stevens, Lochshiel, Jane Cheape, Glenaladale, Ronald Cheape, Glenaladale, Iain Macaskill, Glenmoidart, Colin Surman, Roshven Hill, James Neill, Roshven Hill, Richard Cooke, ADMG, Graeme Taylor, SNH, Hugh Cheape (in the chair).

Welcome: The chairman welcomed those attending the Meeting and thanked Richard Cooke, Chairman ADMG, for joining the Meeting. The chairman mentioned that Paul Bekier would be representing FCS in the place of Colin Lavin who had retired in May 2017 (and had been thanked by the chairman on behalf of the MDMG for his support to the Group over many years).

Apologies: apologies were received from Alistair Forbes, Colin Lees Millais, John MacDonald, David Stewart Howitt, Paul Bekier (Forestry Commission) and Bruce Farquharson and Pat McElhinney (Scottish Fire and Rescue Service).

Minutes and Matters Arising: the Minutes of the Meeting of 22 August 2016 had been circulated and copies were tabled. With no corrections or amendments, the Minutes were agreed. For matters arising, it was reported that radios had been acquired from Scottish Communications Group and Patrick Lees Millais was thanked for carrying this through on behalf of MDMG.

Association of Deer Management Groups: the chair reported to MDMG on the main events that he had attended on behalf of the Group, being Scottish Natural Heritage's 'Sharing Good Practice' in deer management planning, Battleby, 26 April 2017, ADMG and SNH Chairs' and Secretaries' Workshop, Birnam Institute, 17 July 2017, and ADMG Regional Meeting in Glenfinnan, 15 August 2017, all of which charted progress being made in the deer sector, highlighted expectations for further progress and the primacy of the 'deer management plan' as management and communication tool. The chair asked Richard Cooke if he would enlarge on the current situation of the ADMG. Richard Cooke reminded the meeting that we are one year into a three-year review cycle of Deer Management Groups. The 2016 Assessment of the deer sector by SNH had been submitted for review by the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee and progress would be further reviewed in 2019. The Cabinet Secretary's conclusions are awaited but meanwhile an independent Working Group has been suggested for the Highland deer sector and, although remit, membership and chair are still unknown, it is hoped that this will help to counter misinformation and prejudice that has tended to cloak the deer sector. Political attention has been on deer numbers (as a national total) rather than impact. There was some discussion of SNH's existing statutory powers and the use of Section 7 agreements (Voluntary Control Agreement) as against Section 8 (Compulsory Control Scheme) which had not yet been applied. The prevailing voluntary system of deer management is still accepted but the task now is to deliver on DMPs with due progress on Action Plans, deer population targets and Habitat Impact Assessments [HIA]. Focus had been on 'less successful' DMGs and those not having progressed with habitat assessment but funding is now available from SNH on a 50% grant-aid basis for training for habitat assessment and this will be looked into by MDMG. This could include delegating HIA to specialist consultants. Graeme Taylor added to Richard Cooke's points and commented that MDMG had scored well in the SNH 2016 Assessment. He further recommended that the Group consider a peatland restoration scheme.

Moidart Deer Management Plan 2015-2020: the chair introduced the MDMG DMP, HIA, delivering on actions and cull targets, and the next deer count. He stressed the centrality of the DMP and the role of environmental monitoring for progress in 'sustainable deer management' and for ensuring that the public interest was being served in all respects as addressed in the DMP. In the interests of

coherence and effective communication, these issues should now lead agenda-setting and MDMG business. In discussion, preparation and further training for HIA over the Moidart peninsula was agreed for 2018. The chair drew the meeting's attention to the 'Deer Cull 2016-2017' (pre-circulated) and comparison with the DMP population model showed that the stag cull (106) surpassed the target but that the hind and calf cull (160+47) fell short. In order to keep to the DMP target population, the hind and calf cull for 2017-2018 would need to aim for at least 210 hinds and 60 calves. Glenaladale, Glenmoidart and Kinlochmoidart at this point made a commitment to increase their hind cull. It was suggested, and agreed, that cull figures be communicated around the end of the year so that progress towards population targets can be monitored and discussed. Seasonal mortality was discussed briefly since a relatively mild and 'open' winter had ensured proportionate survival and no significant winter die-off, although it was stressed that winter and spring mortality must be systematically scrutinised and logged. Deer vehicle collisions were a further factor in the attrition of a natural deer population although Graeme Taylor confirmed that this had not been significant so far in 2017, in spite of heavy tourist traffic. Lynda Campbell recommended a more detailed audit of 'recruitment' and the Group agreed that a 'Recruitment Return' could be added into a simple template to include a 'Mortality Return' which would include both natural seasonal mortality as well as deer-vehicle accidents. The meeting discussed the next deer count and the means by which this could be efficiently achieved. Graeme Taylor reported that funding had been allocated for a helicopter count of West Lochaber DMG and that this might help manpower availability. It was pointed out that the last MDMG foot-count (March-April 2015) had accounted for 49 man-days.

Scottish Deer Health Survey 2017-2018: the chair reported on the 'Deer Health Survey' which the Moredun Research Institute had presented to the ADMG Regional Meeting on 15 August 2017. DMGs are encouraged to support the project, jointly funded by the Scottish Government and Food Standards Scotland and including all deer species in Scotland, Highland and Lowland, with the objective of assessing the prevalence of *E.coli* 0157, *Cryptosporidium*, and Chronic Wasting Disease. The MDMG agreed with alacrity to sign up to the project and sampling packs were distributed. The project would hope for 10 completed samples from stags and a follow-on with 10 further samples from hinds. Instructions on how to collect the samples are contained in the packs and it was suggested that each sample should be returned directly to the Moredun Institute while notification should be collated through the MDMG chair and secretary.

Any other business: the chair referred to a recently reported poaching incident in Moidart. The report was followed up by all interested parties and it was confirmed that the Police response was very encouraging. Although the incident remains inconclusive, it acted as an effective 'training exercise' and the chair thanked all those involved on behalf of the Group.

The chair reported that he had contributed on behalf of MDMG in March and April to a 'Wild Boar Survey' being conducted as MSc Dissertation by Karen Muller of Perth College, UHI, and the results will be forthcoming.

John MacAulay raised an issue of deer resident on the low ground at Dalilea. It was agreed that culling of these deer would be undertaken and that this would contribute to the MDMG effort to bring deer numbers into line with DMP population targets.

Further discussion was entered on peatland restoration and with information on a fund of £8m that was currently dedicated to this under the Scottish Government's 'Climate Change Agenda'. The Group was urged to investigate peatland restoration and was reminded by ADMG and SNH that action on this would strengthen the Group's performance for the 2019 Assessment.

There being no further competent business, the chair thanked members very much for their attendance and continuing support. The meeting closed at 6 pm.

Date of next meeting: the date of the next meeting was remitted for future consideration.