

## Moidart Deer Management Group

### Minutes of the Meeting

Kinlochmoidart, Monday 22 August 2016, 5 pm

**Present:** Alistair Forbes, Ronald Cheape, James Neill, Colin Surman, Iain MacAskill, Gordon Shankland, John Jackson, Suzanne Stevens, David McCauley, Nino Stewart, John MacDonald, David Stewart Howitt, Robert Clegg, Colin Lees Millais, Jane Cheape, Hugh Cheape (in the chair)

The Meeting opened with the Chair recalling the loss of Archie Gillies in June 2016, how his friendship, ability, experience and leadership had contributed so markedly to the Group and how deeply he would be missed. The Chair reported that he had written on behalf of the MDMG to Archie's widow, Eilidh, and he offered the Meeting copies of the Obituary published in the *Oban Times* on 23 June 2016. The attention of the Meeting was drawn to a further Obituary by the same author in *West Word* which included reference to a comment attributed to Archie voicing his concern this year that stalkers were not to be invited to attend Deer Management Group meetings. The Meeting was concerned how such a groundless and spurious rumour could circulate and agreed that this should be firmly and publicly repudiated.

**Apologies:** apologies were received from Colin Lavin and Phil Green. Graeme Taylor had intimated that, with an earlier commitment on the day, he would be late in arriving.

**Minutes:** the Minutes of the Meeting of the MDMG on 17 August 2015 had been circulated and copies were tabled. With no corrections or amendments, the Minutes were agreed.

**Matters arising:** the Chair admitted that, due to the pressure of work on the DMP, the matter of the acquisition of radios was still outstanding. The Chair apologised to the Meeting and confessed that notification of the helicopter deer count under the auspices of SNH had eased the urgency of their purchase but that the acquisition of radios was as critical as ever. The Chair thanked Tim Leslie for putting into his hands the necessary information on Scottish Communications Group as a source of radios, and reported that he had followed this up by contacting them. He mentioned that a competitive quote might still profitably be sought. The Chair asked if he could delegate the acquisition of radios for the MDMG and it was agreed that Patrick Lees Millais would be willing to undertake this. Points were made that any quote should include waterproof cases and harness and that frequency and waveband should be compliant with/the same as SNH and neighbouring DMGs such as Cona Glen.

**Deer Count:** the Chair referred to the helicopter deer count carried out by SNH on Wednesday 10 February 2016 and expressed the thanks of the Meeting and the Group to SNH for the provision of a deer count which helps so significantly with the work of collaborative deer management, and for the scrupulous planning and execution of the operation. The Chair also thanked MDMG members for their collaboration and assistance to SNH. Digital copies of the map with count data and the Deer Count Report had been circulated to the Group in April and paper copies were tabled for discussion at the meeting. The Chair commented that the SNH count total of 2,292 red deer (693 stags, 1,224 hinds, 375 calves) compared favourably with previous counts and could be said to endorse the effectiveness of MDMG foot counts. The comment was offered that one or two details of the combined results of visual and digital camera technique could be questioned, such as a perceived concentration of stags in the west end of Glenaladale ground and east end of Lochshiel ground but that localised variables made no significant difference to the end result. There was discussion on the frequency of deer counts and concluded that a strategy for a count every two years would be acceptable, given manpower difficulties. The importance of collaboration with neighbouring DMGs for foot counts was emphasized.

**Deer vehicle collisions:** in the absence of SNH comment, the Chair reminded the Meeting that this was an issue that should continue to be closely monitored in collaboration with SNH (who have been co-ordinating data) and reiterated that this comprised a discrete category of information in the DMP and in the public arena, given its deer welfare and public interest implications. There were no recent incidents to report but the Chair commented on the 'spike' in the statistics caused by incidents on the A830 in the area of Leac a' Mhuidhe. It was commented that DVCs were now reduced in this area with maturing of the forestry and the fences becoming porous. The Meeting agreed that DVCs should be added in with data from natural mortality and given prominence in assessment of deer population density.

**Cull, targets and projections:** the Chair drew the Meeting's attention to the population projections proposed in the DMP and the current influence on planning from the stipulation of a density in the area of 5/km<sup>2</sup> as against a current population density of 10/km<sup>2</sup>. The population modelling in the Moidart DMP is predicated on a target density of 8/km<sup>2</sup> which was calculated on the imperative to reduce grazing impact on designated sites. In discussion, it was suggested that the current population was not demonstrating serious damage to the environment but that a heavier hind cull of 210 would help proportionately to reduce the population and reach an appropriate and sustainable balance. SNH had advised that the data and deer management provision for the MDMG should include Eilean Shona, Shona Beag and Kyleswood (which had been included sporadically in the past depending on the interest and compliance of landholders). Their inclusion will raise the overall cull target from a proposed 90 to 100 stags allocated proportionately to individual landholdings. The Meeting considered that any greater increase of overall cull numbers at present would be detrimental to the sporting economy and should be calculated on longer term knowledge and assessment of habitat impact. HIA survey in 2015 showed no unduly adverse grazing damage, apart from areas shared with cattle and sheep, and that careful monitoring of allocated survey plots in the future would offer a better audit baseline for calculating whether a more than proportionate target cull would be necessary. Moidart woodland and forestry management plans will offer further benchmarks and safeguards for habitat protection within the catchment.

**MDMG Deer Management Plan:** the Meeting endorsed the DMP as a useful working document and agreed that amendments and additions should be included before a website version is published on behalf of the MDMG. The Chair drew the Meeting's attention to the 'Targets and Actions' section of the DMP which included, in addition to management culls (as agreed), a number of short and long term and measurable commitments before 2020 and the expiry of the plan; these included *inter alia* a Site Condition Monitoring sampling of approximately 25% of HIA plots in 2017 before the next round of HIA in 2018, a skills audit in 2016-2017 to raise standards in competence and training, enhanced participation in the MDMG, membership of the Scottish Quality Wild Venison scheme, and more systematic monitoring and recording of annual natural mortality. The Chair reported on a new publication from SNH on the welfare of wild deer, notification of which was received on 19 August. The links to the publications on the SNH website will be forwarded to members.

**Any other business:** the matter was raised of holding a spring meeting of landholders and professionals (in April and May) as soon after the end of the cull seasons as convenient, and a larger general meeting in the late summer, for example, in late August as at present. There being no further competent business, the Chair thanked members for their attendance and Mrs Stewart for hosting the meeting at Kinlochmoidart, and the meeting closed at 6.45 pm.

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