

## **Moidart Deer Management Group Minutes of the Meeting**

Slatach, Glenfinnan, Tuesday 21 August 2018, 4 pm

**Present:** Nino Stewart, Kinlochmoidart, David Stewart Howitt, Kinlochmoidart, John Macaulay, Dalilea, David McCauley, Glenaladale, Gordon Shankland, Loch Shiel, David Brennan, Inverailort, Graeme Taylor, SNH, Andrew MacMaster, SNH, Suzanne Stevens, Loch Shiel, Jane Cheape, Glenaladale, Ronald Cheape, Glenaladale, Lynda Campbell, ADMG, Hugh Cheape (in the chair). In attendance, Victor Clements, ADMG / 'Health Check'.

**Welcome:** the chair welcomed those in the Meeting and thanked them warmly for attending. Graeme Taylor took the opportunity to introduce his colleague, Andrew MacMaster, to the Meeting. He is on the SNH team and will be helping with the 2019 Assessments. He has been a wildlife ranger and has worked for FCS, and has considerable expertise in Red Deer. In welcoming Andrew, the chair added that the MacMasters had very longstanding links with the district and that this represents a 'homecoming'.

**Apologies:** apologies were received from Alistair Forbes, James Neill, Colin Surman, Colin Lees Millais, Robert Clegg, Tim Leslie, John Jackson and John MacDonald. Invitations for the Meeting had also been sent to Richard Cooke, ADMG, Dr Cathy Mayne, Mountain Environment Services, and Meghan Parker, Scottish Woodlands, although all had had to send apologies.

**Minutes and matters arising:** the Minutes of the MDMG Meeting of 21 August 2017 had been circulated and copies were tabled. Since Richard Cooke had addressed last year's meeting, it was reported that he had made a number of minor corrections following the Meeting; and the Minutes were then agreed with no further amendments. Matters arising were carried forward in the present Agenda.

**Moidart Deer Count, 2018, actions and targets:** the chair reported that the deer count had been carried out on 28, 29 and 30 March 2018 with two extra days to complete Dorlin and Eilean Shona. He thanked the team on behalf of the Meeting for their diligence and professionalism and commented on the successful completion of a count and the close and fruitful comparison of the numbers with the 2016 SNH helicopter count. Doubts over the viability of a count in circumstances of predicted heavy natural mortality had been discussed and advice sought from neighbouring deer groups, ADMG and SNH. The count totals were Stags 675, Hinds 1148, Calves 357. The data was circulated on 15 May 2018 and was tabled in the Meeting, and comments were invited. Comments were that more deer had died after the count and the chair reiterated the need for careful recording of this, and that other

causes of annual fatalities such as DVCs and railway strikes should be monitored (as has been the practice). In the light of the agreed DMP population model, the reported absence (or shortage) of mature stags and a continuing imbalance between stags and hinds, it was agreed after considerable discussion that the hind cull still has to be raised. A target cull of 220 hinds for 2018-19 implies that over 30 hinds should be added to the cull achieved in 2017-18, and the very helpful suggestion was made that landholdings could aim for a pro rata or 5 hind increase to their cull.

**Scottish Deer Health Survey:** the chair gave an update of the Moredun Research Institute's survey and congratulated the MDMG for their ready participation. A reported 1,000 samples had been collected from the Red Deer population nationwide and it is noteworthy that this has been the largest research project of its type in the UK. Funding has come from Food Standards Scotland and the Scottish government and a full report is anticipated.

**SNH Habitat Training and Support, 2018:** this took place on 25-26 June 2018 in response to SNH's grant-aid to DMGs to support them in building expertise for regular Habitat Impact Assessment [HIA] and future capacity to assess the health of habitats on which the deer population depends. The MDMG has contracted with Dr Cathy Mayne of *Mountain Environment Services* as consultant, a training day was followed by a fieldwork day and survey and data-collection is ongoing. The chair thanked SNH for this initiative and expressed the satisfaction of the group that the experience has been not just essential and timely but also enjoyable. HIA was identified as an action point in the current DMP (Paragraphs 9.8 – 9.9) but as response to this funding, a partial HIA for Moidart has been extended to all the dwarf shrub heath and blanket bog habitat plots.

**Moidart DMG operational 'Health Check ':** the chair reported on the ADMG sponsored 'health check' of the MDMG's progress in preparation for SNH's 2019 Reassessment of DMPs. A full discussion of the current DMP with Victor Clements took place on 24 July 2018, concentrating on the Benchmark Assessment and the Public Interest criteria. A report with recommendations was received on 3 August and was circulated to the MDMG. The chair had asked Victor if he would be able to attend the Meeting and he very kindly gave a summary of DMP progress. A point of principal concern is the 'unfavourable' condition of designated woodland sites and native woodland habitats in Moidart which, according to the Native Woodland Survey of Scotland (2014), are experiencing very high impacts and the highest in Mainland Scotland. The chair responded to this with points already submitted by members of the MDMG on stewardship of woodlands and the fact that he is opening up discussion with neighbouring deer groups which share the same issue.

**Deer Management Plans SNH Reassessment, 2019:** this has been a constant note of ADMG and SNH communications this year and the imperatives of this have been passed on to group members. The chair reported on the most recent SNH letter, 15 August 2018, setting out government expectations and a schedule for the reassessment between 1 April and 15 May 2019. This letter and its attachments have been circulated as guidance for the assembling of the next stage of the Moidart DMP 2018-2023.

**Any other business:** under any other business, the chair raised the matter of peatland restoration which has been discussed as part of MDMG business since the submission of the current DMP in 2015-16. Glenaladale is receiving funding for peatland surveying and the chair recommended other group members to consider this as government funding is still available, drawing on the £8-9m under the 'Climate Change' agenda. SNH is recommending that a collective approach might be more effective and is reminding the MDMG that engagement with peatland restoration will be favourably regarded in the 2019 Reassessment.

Lynda Campbell reminded the Meeting of ADMG agenda matters, that the next meeting is in Inverness on 21 November 2018, that members are invited to return the Questionnaire included in *Scope 12* (Summer 2018) on 'Survey of Stalking Rents', that free surveys of premises and facilities are currently available for membership of Scottish Quality Assured Venison (and notice of this has already been circulated to the MDMG), and that the process of Sporting Rates appeal is underway.

The chair asked John Macaulay about the issue of deer on farmland grazings which he had raised at the MDMG Meeting 21 August 2017. He said that efforts had been made to reduce this but that essentially the problem remained. The chair asked members to remain vigilant about this.

**Date of next meeting:** the chair reminded the Meeting that the suggestion had earlier been made that the main MDMG annual meeting might usefully be held after the stag season rather than in the late summer. It is suggested therefore that, following a spring meeting of the group around May 2019, next year's annual meeting could be held in October / November 2019. The fixing of a date for this could be remitted to early in the New Year. There being no further business, the chair thanked those attending for their time and support, and the Meeting closed at 6 pm.