

NORTHERN DEER MANAGEMENT GROUP

Summary Minutes of the August Meeting, Tuesday 28th August 2018 at Kildonan Hall

Present: Chair - Howard Palmer (Latheronwheel West), Treasurer & Outgoing Secretary - Anson MacAuslan (Langwell & Braemore), New Secretary – Helen MacIntyre, SNH – Holly Deary & Debbie Skinner, ADMG – Tom Chetwynd & Victor Clements, representatives from: Langwell, Braemore, Achentoul, RSPB, Dunbeath, Glutt, Shurrery, Bighouse, Skelpick & Rhifail, Badanloch, Torrish, Number One Holding, Suisgill, Achkeepster, Fountains Forestry.

Apologies: Dalnawillan, Strathy, Syre, Forestry Commission, SGRPID, Sandside, Strathmore & Broubster Forests, Armadale Farm

1. **Welcome and Apologies** - The Chairman welcomed everyone and opened the meeting at 2.30pm.
2. **Approval of minutes of meeting on 10th May 2018.** Minutes were approved, with one alteration: section 4, paragraph five, the word 'cull' had been used instead of 'count'.
3. **Matters arising / actions** - None that would not be covered during the course of the meeting.
4. **Secretarial support**
The Chairman introduced Helen MacIntyre as new group secretary and explained that she had been secretary of the Inveraray & Tyndrum DMG for a period of years and was happy to take on a similar role with us.
5. **Treasurers' Report**
All 2017 subscription invoices have been paid in full, with one payment outstanding from 2016. There is also an outstanding payment towards the Deer Management Plan. It was agreed that the outstanding monies would be chased up by the Treasurer and that invoices for 2018 subscriptions would be sent out in September. The treasurer's report was approved and accepted.

The SNH grant of £1,800 is ring fenced and is to be used toward the provision of training for Habitat Impact Assessments.

6. **Culls and Counts**
The Chairman pointed out that winter mortality had clearly been high and that further mortality had been noted since the count and since the collation of the mortality data. Observed numbers could only be an underestimate of overall losses.

AM said that he very much hoped SNH would be able to undertake a helicopter count this winter as it was clear that quite a lot had changed since the last one in 2013. A number of Estates had undertaken significant reduction culls and now we had high winter mortality and reports of a lower calving rate this summer. SNH said that the helicopter count could take place either before or after Christmas and much depended on the weather. Ours was obviously not the only count which needed to be done.

There was a discussion about the differences between foot counts and helicopter counts. It was agreed amongst the members that we undertake a foot count in March 2019 regardless of the fact that a helicopter count was going to take place. Whilst it would be useful to compare the two it is more important to consider trends of the foot count against other similar foot counts.

The group members were asked what their intentions were for culls in the coming months and in general the answers were that they would cull similar or lower numbers to last year.

7. **2019 review of DMGs**
There was discussion around the subject of the forthcoming review. SNH said that we needed to work from the July 2018 review which had identified areas that need action. There were some fundamental issues which needed addressing, for example having an 'active Deer Management Plan' which formed the basis of

discussion at meetings going forward. Setting of cull targets, improved counts and the like were all things we should aim to achieve.

Other things could be done fairly easily for example our DMP could go on the website along with summary minutes, culls and counts and maps of the area.

Inter-meeting communications were not a strong point for the group. It was proposed that we have an Exec Committee going forward consisting of a representative for each sub-group area. This committee would 'meet' between meetings, this may be 'virtually' or it may be in person. Members of the Exec would be the Chair, Treasurer, an RSPB rep and others to be identified after the meeting. SNH should be invited to attend these meetings also.

In future we would put forward a short document annually which would be a plan for the next 12 months. The Chair will draft, Tom Chetwynd (ADMG) agreed to help with this and also to help set up a population model for the group.

HIA records and reports were discussed. SNH have given us £1,800 of funding towards training and that training will take place next spring. In the meantime we should collate the info we do have. A member asked what we were supposed to do with the HIA's as SNH seemed not to want them. SNH said that it was not the results necessarily that SNH wanted it was more the principle that Estates should use the information to inform future management. It was clear there was a need for training on how to collate and interpret the data and this could be done next spring also.

Victor Clements (ADMG) said that he felt the group could usefully spend some money on taking advice on exactly how we collect the HIA material. It was possible that we could do this at sub-group level and effectively reduce the number of required plots. If everyone does a little then it adds up to a lot. In his experience with other groups the HIA evidence had been far more useful than anyone had imagined at the outset. The Chair said we needed a clear plan and timescale for implementing HIAs across the group in advance of the review.

Victor said that his 'health check' (on behalf of ADMG) would look at our DMP, the meeting, the 2016 review and discussions with office bearers with a view to providing us with a useful report on how we might improve.

8. **SNH Update**

Holly Deary said that she felt the issue at hand was the 2019 review and this had been discussed fully.

9. **Any Other Competent Business**

Sporting rates were discussed, and all agreed that they presented far more problems for Government to collect than they could possibly have imagined when they decided to reintroduce them. They were effectively a land tax as they were not related to actual likely rental values; which all business rates must be.

It was pointed out that more than ever now we are dependent on each other for the provision of accurate statistics such as counts. It is critical that sub-groups keep and maintain accurate records and that everyone is involved. The meeting has illustrated a difference in counting methodology (helicopter versus foot counts and how 'others' are split up) and that the mortality figures had clearly been under-recorded this winter. This is not the way we should conduct our business. Each member must be able to rely on the data provided by others and we are mutually dependent on each other.

A draft constitution has been circulated. The Constitution was adopted IN PRINCIPLE.

There was discussion about the venison industry and Tom Chetwynd said that the industry was under pressure as it was the only unregulated food market in the country. Some disagreed, believing that the supply of venison to game dealers seemed highly regulated and everyone had undertaken training to effectively allow professional stalkers to 'sign off' carcasses as fit for human consumption. Most of us were in quality assurance schemes and / or our larders were registered and we had licenses to deal in game.

10. **Date of Next Meeting** - Thursday 9th May, 2.30pm at Kildonan Hall.