

**MINUTES of the MID TERM MEETING of the
NORTH ROSS DEER MANAGEMENT
GROUP held on FRIDAY
8 JUNE 2018 at 10am at ALLADALE**

Present:	Mr P Creasey	Strathvaich (Chairman)
	Mr M J Taylor	Bell Ingram (Secretary)
	Mr I Macneill	Alladale
	Mr P Lister	Alladale
	Mr Neil Sutherland	Alladale
	Mr R Munro	Alladale
	Mr I Collier	Clach Liath
	Mr A Mackenzie	Corriemulzie/Loubcroy
	Mr A Sutherland	Croick
	Mr A Sutherland	Glencalvie
	Mr R Macaskill	Highland Deer & HABITAT Solutions
	Mr J Buckthorp	Inverlael Deer Forest
	Mr J Whitteridge	Inverlael Estate
	Mr I Duncan	Kildermorie
	Mrs C Duncan	Kildermorie
	Mr D Campbell	Langwell
	Mr H Bulmer	Ledmore
	Mr J Legrand	East Rhidorroch
	Mr C Harrison	West Rhidorroch
	Mr D Macrae	Strathvaich
	Mr G Beattie	Wyvis
	Mr W Grant	Wyvis
In Attendance:	Mr S Coghill	SNH
	Mr Chris Donald	SNH
	Ms T Lawton	SNH
	Ms C Gilfillan	Bell Ingram
Apologies:	Ms L Seivwright	ADMG
	Mr C Thomsen	Braemore
	Mr S Colvin	Corriemulzie
	Mr W Lamont	FCS
	Mr A Harington	Glencalvie
	Dr B Bodles	Highland Birchwoods
	Mr P Dacre	Langwell
	Mr D Bulmer	Ledmore
	Mrs R Bulmer	Ledmore
	Mr N Fraser	Novar
	Mr R Wilson	NRDMG
	Ms S Agnew	SNH

1. WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed the Group to the meeting and extended his thanks to Paul Lister for hosting the day at Alladale. He went on to thank Crispian Cook of Bell Ingram (Crispian was not present) for his assistance in the role of Secretary and highlighted that due to Crispian's efforts, the Group was much closer to achieving their objectives ahead of the 2019 review.

Malcolm Taylor of Bell Ingram introduced himself and reported that he would be taking over the secretarial duties of the Group until Rob Whitson (formerly of Strutt & Parker) took up his position with Bell Ingram in late July. The appointment of office bearers would be dealt with at the AGM in October. The Chairman advised that anyone who wished to be considered for either role of Secretary or Chairman, would have the opportunity to present to the Group at that stage.

The Chairman outlined the current political climate for deer management and was encouraged to see such a good attendance at the meeting. However, he urged every proprietor to attend the AGM in October as this would be the last meeting before the 2019 Review. He emphasised the importance of collaboration and the risks that DMG's faced in losing their status as a voluntary sector if progress was not made. The Group has several areas within its SNH assessment that still require work and although significant progress has been made, action plans now need to be implemented and documented to be able to demonstrate progress. The Chairman proposed that e-mail questionnaires are developed to address each of the points within the SNH assessment and are sent to members before the AGM for completion. This was agreed by the Group.

The Chairman highlighted that Mrs Bulmer had suggested at last year's AGM that the sub groups meet separately to discuss cull targets, as this could be better facilitated at a local level given the extent of the NRDMG. It was suggested that these meetings would be centred around the count co-ordinators. It was agreed that this would be considered in more detail once this year's population model was complete.

The paper from SNH regarding the proposed changes to the S7 agreements within the group was circulated and it was agreed that this would be discussed in more detail later in the meeting.

It was noted that all agendas, minutes and action lists from each NRDMG would be published on the website to support the requirement for transparency as detailed in the SNH Assessment.

2. APOLOGIES

The apologies were intimated to the meeting.

3. MINUTES OF MEETING ON 15 OCTOBER 2017

After a short discussion, Members considered and approved the minutes as an accurate record of the meeting on 15 October. Secnder - Mr I Duncan.

4. MATTER ARISING

The Secretary confirmed that all the actions from the last meeting had been completed, but that there were still gaps in the information being provided, specifically mortality rates, recruitment rates and count figures.

Members advised that the reason for the shortage of count figures earlier in the year was due to the weather, with deep snow limiting access to the hill at the time of the count. It was agreed that more information was required for the deer population model and the Secretary will write to individual Estates to obtain the missing count figures.

5. FINANCIAL UPDATE

The Secretary presented the statement and advised that all subscription invoices had now been sent and that these would be received by members shortly.

6. 2017/2018 HIND CULL

The Chairman congratulated the group on the success of the hind cull, with many Estates culling more than the additional 30% planned increase from last year. The Secretary noted that there were still some missing cull returns and he would be chasing these Estates for their figures.

7. 2018 RECRUITMENT AND MORTALITY SURVEY

The poor weather at the start of the year had a significant impact on mortality rates, with much higher rates being reported. Recruitment rates had further suffered a reduction, with some members reporting only 11 - 15% recruitment. It was agreed that more information was required for the deer population model before a true assessment could be made of the mortality and recruitment and the Secretary will write to individual Estates to obtain the missing information.

8. HABITAT MONITORING

The habitat monitoring is being undertaken by Dr Bodles who hopes to start work shortly. The Chairman noted that SNH had contributed £1800 towards the Habitat Impact Assessment work that Dr Bodles was undertaking and thanked Chris Donald of SNH.

9. S7 AGREEMENT

The Chairman invited Chris Donald of SNH to present the paper on the options for the NRDMG's current and future S7 agreements. Mr Donald summarised the options which included continuing the current S7 agreements at Beinn Dearg and Ben Wyvis for another five years, bringing them to an end and offering further support to for appropriate management or negotiating a new S7 across the whole Group. He recognised that whilst some estates have worked very hard to reduce deer numbers in the existing S7 areas, the deer are still having a detrimental impact on key habitats.

Mr Donald stated that this had prompted SNH to look at the DMG as a whole, in order to identify any patterns, which identified a density gradient with the deer becoming transient and moving from high density populations, further east. In view of this, SNH are recommending that the whole of the NRDMG enters into a new S7 agreement. This would be facilitated by increased resources from SNH like helicopters counts and assistance with habitat monitoring. Mr Coghill was eager to emphasise that this approach was all about collaboration, rather than compulsion. Existing S7 meetings are planned for the end of June and it was agreed that all members of the NRDMG should be invited.

The Chairman invited responses to the paper from the members. Mr I MacNeill highlighted the increase in the number of deer that had been culled on Alladale and voiced his frustration that despite the reduction, the habitats were not recovering. He reported that Alladale currently has a deer density of around 8-9 deer/sq km but was looking to reduce this to 2-3 deer/sq km and recognised that this may have a vacuum effect. He supported the idea of a wider S7 agreement and encouraged other members to engage with the process, to avoid problems in the future.

Mr A Sutherland highlighted the success of the additional culling undertaken by Estates last winter to increase the overall hind cull, which was agreed and implemented as a Group. In view of this, he urged caution with entering into a wider S7 agreement as the Group had made significant progress in the past two years in organising themselves and delivering on objectives.

Mr I Duncan advised that he had concerns about a wider S7 agreement and that better communication between Estates was starting to yield results.

Mr J Whitteridge reported that he felt the Rory Putman survey was flawed and there were a number of issues with the science behind the surveys. He felt that a review of the survey was necessary.

The Chairman advised that if a new S7 agreement was put into place for the whole group, it would not replace the function of the NRDMG, as had been the case with other groups. He suggested that a sub-committee be formed with members of the NRDMG and SNH (including a member of senior management, ie Robbie Kernahan) to review the habitat targets and the hurdles to deer management in meeting these. SNH were in agreement with this proposal.

It was agreed that the Chairman would write to all proprietors before the S7 meetings at the end of June, outlining the position and asking for their responses.

10. FORESTRY COOPERATION FUND

The Secretary reported that this was currently being considered and would report back to the Group with more detail shortly.

11. DMP REVIEW

The next DMP review will be undertaken in spring 2019. Chris Donald of SNH reported that he felt the plan still required some work and he would provide a copy of the recent review to circulate to members. It was agreed that the Secretary would circulate a copy of the review on receipt from SNH.

The Secretary and Chairman will also be organising for the DMP to have a 'health check' from the ADMG to identify any improvements necessary.

12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Ian Duncan asked if the Group was subject to any changes under the new GDPR regulations. The Secretary advised that Bell Ingram had a Privacy Policy relating to how personal data was stored and used and a link to the policy would be circulated to all members. It was noted that each individual would not have to sign an agreement to state that they were happy to be contacted, but that if there were any concerns, to contact the Secretary directly.

Charles Harrison advised that any questions regarding West Rhidorroch should now be directed to him in the first instance.

Innes MacNeill reported that the grading for venison was now higher, with a stricter focus on quality, cross contamination and larder facilities. He added that Alladale have now stopped all commercial deer stalking with guests. John Whitteridge suggested that the Group consider a similar position as the Danish, by considering alternatives to lead. He highlighted the potential benefits of lead free venison for sale to supermarkets.

13. DATE AND VENUE OF NEXT MEETING

The Secretary will liaise with the Chairman and agree a suitable time and date once Rob Whitson takes up his position next month. The Secretary will circulate to members.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 4pm

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MJT/NRDMG/1
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