

# Minutes of the East Sutherland Deer Management Group Practitioners Meeting

The Golspie Inn 2.00 p.m. Monday 11<sup>th</sup> May 2018

<b>Present:</b>  Tom Chetwynd – Chair (Loch Choire) John McMorran – Acting Secretary (Balnacoil) Grant Symmers (Balnacoil) Robbie Rowantree (Gordonbush) Richard Bain (Torrish) Brian Lyall (Badanloch) Lorne MacNicol (Tressady) Craig MacNicol (Tressady) Leigh Hague (Ben Armine) Andrew Robertson (Clebrig) Sir Michael Wigan (Borrobol)	  John MacDonald (Borrobol) George Stevenson (Kildonan) Martin Grant (Kildonan) Holly Deary (SNH) David Patterson (SNH) Pieter Bakker (Altnaharra) Neil MacKay (Loch Choire) Klaus Olofsen (Suisgill) Blair Colvin (Kintradwell) Anna Nicholson (Clebrig) Andrew Nicholson (Clebrig)
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## 1. Welcome

The Chairman offered those present a warm welcome and noted that there were two new representatives present, George Stevenson (Kildonan) and Klaus Olofsen (Suisgill).

## 2. Apologies

Derick Macaskill (FCS Dalchork), Martin MacDonald (West Garty), Robbie Milne (West Garty), Andrew MacKay (Dalnessie), John Billet (Kintradwell), James Urquhart (Dunrobin).

## 3. Minutes of Practitioners Meeting

All present were asked for comments on the minutes of the Practitioners Meeting held on 5 March 2018. They were approved by Brian Lyall and seconded by Blair Colvin.

## **4. Deer Management Plan**

### **4.1 Population Model**

A spreadsheet was circulated prior to the meeting showing an updated population model originally based on the helicopter count undertaken in March 2017 which coincided with the new 5 year ESDMG Plan.

This model showed that good progress had been made during 2017/2018 season and along with the more prolonged winter and higher natural mortality, overall density was coming down. Sir Michael Wigan asked for clarification on the constituents of the East group which was given.

The Chairman ran through the figures on the spreadsheet stressing that the reduced density was not an excuse to be complacent and that the culls set in the plan should continue to be applied until next year's data could be factored in.

There was a brief round the table discussion on how members had found mortality on the various Estates with highest incidence in the NW group. Concerns were also raised about the impending 2018 calving, given condition of hinds and lateness of spring.

Robbie Rowantree suggested taking stock of this year's calving prior to next meet in July 2018 which would be a more suitable time to deliberate over the recruitment.

### **4.2 Habitat Monitoring**

The Chairman reported that information collected through the survey showed that most Estates were now undertaking some form of habitat assessment. There were some who felt refresher courses would be useful to hone their skills and this could be addressed through future courses funded by monies secured from SNH. It was suggested a day course be hosted in each of the areas within the group. Further information would be supplied.

Brian Lyall commented that climatic conditions could have as much impact on habitat as deer, citing recent damage done by drying east winds.

### **4.3 Public Interest**

The Chairman outlined to the group that as a measure of compliance in fulfilling Public Interest, SNH take account of how each Deer Group functions both in a meeting and information gathering context and ultimately in the delivery of the DMP. A colour coded summary sheet of Public Interest delivery was issued, showing success in some areas (green), others needing some further effort (amber) and several in red requiring significant action or clarification from SNH on detail required and actions to be undertaken (red).

The Chairman mentioned that it was not always obvious what constituted PI, pointing out that woodland proposals were a good example. The survey monkey circulated had flagged up four or five estates planning a total of almost 1,000ha (2,500 acres) of new woodland. Information such as this needs to be continuously collected and summarized to demonstrate that the group are delivering on the actions overall.

Lorne McNicol raised concern over a recent crofter forestry application which had gone through the system without Tressady Estate (the Land owner) being consulted. This small scheme (13ha) had resulted in several DVCs as the fence line was not properly thought out. Proper consultation could have avoided this and he called for Forestry Commission Scotland to liaise with the deer groups concerned, when considering applications. It was felt that DMG's were expected to be open with information for all other land interests and that this should be a two way channel.

Other examples were highlighted: such as good practice to enhance carbon storage, Bio-security (information on Lyme disease & Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) in deer) and plans in place to deal with marauding deer to name a few. In general, deer groups had to be seen to be considering the Public Interest and delivering actions in all aspects of operation.

#### **4.4 Training Requirements**

The DMG were now monitoring training requirements for the group members and all estates should make sure that employees are proficient in First Aid, ATV use and have or are working towards DMQ2.

It was noted through the recent survey that several members required both First Aid and Argocat training as well as DMQ2 assessment

#### **5. SNH Report**

Holly Deary updated the meeting on the role of SNH which is to essentially monitor progress in the delivery of the deer management plan adopted by ESDMG and to look for continual improvement in performance.

Pieter Bakker (Altnaharra) had concerns about the broad spectrum of criteria that estates were being assessed against, over and above their deer management commitments. Holly replied that SNH were not expecting every estate to meet all criteria but that the group as a whole would function to meet the wider interest.

At this point in the meeting the chairman introduced Peter Wilkinson of Savills, who was passing through from a meeting in Caithness. Peter previously worked for the Scottish Government department responsible for the re-introduction of sporting rates. The group was given a detailed summary of the Sporting Rates system which can be broken down in to stages. Stage 1 covers the basic assessment of the land which closed to appeal for phase 1 properties at the end of March 2018. Stage 2 is now

ongoing and deals with the specific appeal process and the various allowances that had been established. These could be appealed in retrospect and would deal with matters such as unoccupied relief, how much of the total area was used for sporting purposes, and whether culls were seen as sporting or habitat management. More information was available, but the onus was on the appellant to inquire further. It was expected that further adjustments would follow re reliefs available.

The Chairman thanked Peter for taking the time to call in.

## **6. ADMG Report**

All DMGs will be assessed nationally as a whole by SNH in Spring 2019. SNH have stated that a fair & proportionate approach will be taken and it is essential that no groups should be seen to bring the rest of the deer sector down.

ADMG have offered to gauge a DMGs performance against the last assessment in 2016, their DMP and the anticipated SNH assessment in 2019 and this is being scheduled for the end of June 2018.

The Deer Working Group is continuing to determine on how the deer management sector is performing and will deliver their report to the Minister by April 2019. The report will recommend changes to ensure effective deer management in Scotland that safeguards public interests and promotes the sustainable management of wild deer both in the uplands and lowlands.

The venison sector is continuing to face challenges and to help overcome this ADMG have produced three food safety films to highlight potential high-risk areas of contamination in the venison food chain, all of which are now available on line. Food Safety Scotland have stated that they will continue to monitor the situation closely.

A consultation is currently running to ask whether "Scottish Wild Venison" should be given Protected Geographical Indication under the EU protected food name scheme. This runs to 29<sup>th</sup> May 2018.

ADMG will issue a stalking rent questionnaire in summer 2018. This survey was last undertaken in 2011 and provided useful information and evidence of the economic benefit derived from stalking.

The Chairman reminded everyone of the ADMG Workshops being held in Birnam and Inverness of 6 & 7 June. Proprietors and stalkers were all encouraged to attend.

## **7. Date of Next Meeting**

To be held in the Golspie Inn at 2:00pm on Friday 20<sup>th</sup> July as a Practitioners pre-season meeting where an assessment of 2018 calving will be discussed, and the 2018 season cull figures will be agreed.