

**East Sutherland Deer Management Group
Steering Group Meeting – Ben Klibreck SSSI**

**The Golspie Inn, Golspie
Friday, 10 May 2019**

Present

Neil Mackay (NM)	- Loch Choire	Andrew Nicholson (AN)	- Clebrig
Pieter Bakker (PB)	- Altnaharra	Anna Nicholson (ANN)	- Clebrig
Derick Macaskill (DM)	- Dalchork / F&LS	Andrew Robertson (AR)	- Dalchork / F&LS
Tom Chetwynd (TC)	- Secretary / ESDMG	David Patterson (DP)	- SNH

1.0 Welcome

TC welcomed those present and explained that the meeting was being held to provide the Steering Group with an opportunity to recap on what had previously been discussed in connection with Ben Klibreck SSSI and to see what matters stood after two years of culling and Habitat Impact Assessments (HIA).

2.0 Draft Statement of Intent (SOI)

TC referred to the draft Statement of Intent that was circulated to those present by email on 1 May 2019. This draft was based on the original version produced by SNH on 26 June 2017 and the latest update was undertaken on 9 October 2017.

The Introduction to the draft SOI states:

This SOI is intended to underpin the positive measures outlined within the East Sutherland Deer Management Plan (2016-2025), as discussed at the Ben Klibreck SSSI Steering Group Meetings held on both 5 May 2017 and 7 July 2017, to bring this site back into Favourable Condition. This SOI will run for the period 2017 - 2022, which will fit with the timescales for management and population modelling outlined within the Deer Management Plan.

The overall objectives of the SOI are to deliver a prompt pace of population reduction between the four properties to a density that is intended to move the site towards "Favourable" condition whilst also continuing to ensure an economically sustainable sporting cull for the properties involved.

Since the last meeting of the Steering Group in 2017, all four properties undertook a reduction cull as signed up to in the DMP, as adjusted at the Practitioners Meeting held on 7 July 2017, during the 2017-18 season. The region then suffered heavy mortality in Winter 2017-18 and therefore all culls were reduced for the 2018-19 season.

3.0 Points Discussed & Issues Raised

The discussions that followed covered a range of matters and issues including the following:

- **Sheep Numbers:** PB raised concerns over the number of sheep continuing to graze Crask and Dalchork Hill and stray on to Vagastie (Altnaharra) which he felt may number up to 150 at

times. DP said that SNH were currently confirming sheep numbers through the Scottish Government Agricultural returns given that a management plan was being prepared to deal with herbivore grazing issues in the area in a constructive manner. DM confirmed that this grazing continues to be exercised under a servitude right and that F&LS had made grazing available elsewhere for the grazier. **(AP 1)**

- **Cattle Numbers:** DP confirmed that cattle had been removed from Dalchork Hill so the trampling previously identified through Site Condition Monitoring (SCM) should now be avoided.
- **Clebrig – AECS Application:** AN confirmed that he had been in discussion with DP in connection with AECS application which had now been submitted. This included provision for away wintering of stock along with other measures.
- **Deer Populations:** The deer population included within the draft SOI were discussed considering the foot count undertaken in Spring 2019 and the count numbers can be summarised as follows:

Ben Klibreck SSSI Deer Count Summaries: 2008 - 19							
Ref	Estate	Area ha. acres		Count Total Dec-08	Count Total Mar-17	Count Total Mar-19	Density - 2019 Total Area (sq.km): 121.3
1	Dalchork	1,950	4,818	242	261	210	10.8
2	Altnahara	1,212	2,995	102	87	41	3.4
3	Clebrig	4,689	11,587	578	732	589	12.6
4	Loch Choire*	4,283	10,584	1,224	2,081	534	12.5
	Total:	12,134	29,984	2,146	3,161	1,374	11.3
	Density			10.4	15.3	11.3	
NB: Loch Choire figures include the total counts for the whole estate in 2008 and 2017							
All four estates extend to 206.2 sq.km overall							

Discussion followed on the ESDMG Deer Management Plan (2016-2025) and the wording of the draft SOI which states:

The DMP has identified a target deer density for these estates as 8-10 deer per km² overall. As part of this SOI, these estates are committed to delivering the overall reduction in deer densities across this site in accordance with the Deer Management Plan in order to move the condition of the site to "Favourable".

TC mentioned the proposed fixed wing aerial count for Spring 2019 and given that all had agreed to trial this in 2019 it will be reconsidered for Spring 2020.

- **Future Culls:** NM and AN both confirmed that culls would be increased on Loch Choire and Clebrig respectively in 2019-20 whereas PB confirmed that culls would be maintained on Vagastie at levels agreed in the DMP.

DM proposed that given that Dalchork holds a large number of stags over the winter, F&LS would make use of an Out of Season authorisation (OOS) to undertake the proposed cull, on a selective basis but over a longer period using both the sporting tenant and direct staff. This should have the effect of disturbing deer off Dalchork on to neighbouring estates over the winter months.

Discussion followed on the lack of disturbance caused by moderated rifles and F&LS agreed to fire a shot without a moderator following the culling of each and every stag.

- **Collaboration:** NM raised issues with access to Carn-an-Fheidh / Creag an Lochan and DM confirmed that F&LS would be prepared to discuss a suitable access route across Dalchork and to collaborate with Loch Choire where necessary.
- **Communication:** It was agreed to continue with regular weekly communication by email through a Ben Klibreck contact group.
- **Target Populations:** DP proposed that the target population for Ben Klibreck SSSI should be based on 8 deer per sq.km given the target population for the NW Sub-group agreed within the DMP is 7.5 deer per sq.km. Discussion followed that the draft SOI stated 8 – 10 deer per sq.km and that the population model based on the Spring 2019 count is in line with the population model signed up to under the DMP at 10.3 deer per sq.km.

***Note:** An updated Population Model showing the Spring 2019 count data and proposed culls for the next 3 years was produced post-meeting and this is attached below for discussion. It should be noted that the Spring 2019 foot count for Ben Klibreck SSSI is within slightly lower than the overall numbers indicated in the ESDMG population model. The difference is within 5% overall.*

- **Habitat Monitoring:** TC indicated that and the HIA data collated to date suggests that approximately 93% of sample plots in Ben Klibreck SSSI are indicating Low – Medium impacts.

DP confirmed that SNH will be undertaking SCM of the Blanket Bog in Summer 2019 and that the reports should be available in Autumn 2019.

- **Other Matters:** DP proposed that the draft SOI should be maintained as an informal mechanism and that ideally members would provide agreement via a confirmation email. TC proposed that the meeting should be taken as an annual review as proposed under the draft SOI and given the two-year gap and progress made since the initial meeting in 2017 that these draft minutes would be treated as a discussion paper until they are approved. TC also proposed that they should be attached to the draft SOI as an addendum rather than redrafting the SOI at this point.
- **Date of Next Meeting:** Prior to the ESDMG Spring 2020 Meeting.

East Sutherland Deer Management Group (ESDMG)										2017 - 22										Loch Choire										Clebrig										Vagastie (Altraharra)										Dalchork (Forestry and Land Scotland)										Whole 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Population Model - Ben Klibreck SSSI:										36% 33% 3% 45% 55%										Area: 127.9 sq.km Target Density: 7.5 959 Target Population: 352 Recruitment: 0.33										Area: 46.9 sq.km Target Density: 7.5 352 Target Population: 352 Recruitment: 0.36										Area: 12.1 sq.km Target Density: 7.5 91 Target Population: 146 Recruitment: 0.36										Area: 19.5 sq.km Target Density: 7.5 146 Target Population: 146 Recruitment: 0.36										Area: 206.4 sq.km Target Density: 1,402 Target Population: 1,402 Recruitment: 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