

**East Sutherland Deer Management Group
Practitioners Meeting**

**The Golspie Inn, Golspie
Friday, 26 July 2019**

Present

John McMorran	- <i>Vice-Chair / Balnacail</i>	Dermot Pakenham	- <i>Badanloch</i>
Neil Mackay	- <i>Loch Choire</i>	Blair Colvin	- <i>Kintradwell</i>
Leigh Hague	- <i>Ben Armine</i>	Martin Grant	- <i>Kildonan</i>
Brian Lyall	- <i>Badanloch</i>	Grant Symmers	- <i>Balnacoil</i>
Thomas Plant	- <i>SSE Renewables</i>	Alex Plummer	- <i>Badanloch</i>
Andrew Robinson	- <i>FLS</i>	David Patterson	- <i>SNH</i>
James Urquhart	- <i>Dunrobin & Dalreavoch</i>	Holly Deary	- <i>SNH</i>
Derick Macaskill	- <i>FLS</i>	Tom Chetwynd	- <i>Secretary</i>

1.0 Welcome

The Chair welcomed those present.

2.0 Apologies

Sir Michael Wigan	- <i>Chair / Borrobol</i>	John Billett	- <i>Kintradwell</i>
John Macdonald	- <i>Borrobol</i>	Lorne MacNicol	- <i>Tressady</i>
Andrew Mackay	- <i>Dalnessie</i>	Becy Stickland	- <i>Clebrig</i>

3.0 Minutes

The Minutes of the Practitioners Meeting held on 22 February 2019 were approved with no changes. These were approved by Andrew Mackay and seconded by George Stephenson.

4.0 Matters Arising

There were no matters arising from the last meeting or minutes.

5.0 Financial Report

TC referred to the financial report circulated to Members on 8 May 2019. This laid out both the Bank Balances and Cash position as at 1 April 2018 and 1 April 2019 and the Budget & Actual position for the current year.

TC ran through the Budget and pointed out that the annual levies had not been paid to ADMG for the last 4 years and that these, in addition to the DMG running costs were being collected through the subscription invoices sent out to Members in January 2019. He confirmed that subscriptions had been received from 14 Members to date in addition to 3 outstanding contributions towards the DMP and that 6 subscriptions remained outstanding as at 1 May 2019. Statements had now been issued to these Members.

TC confirmed that ADMG had been kept informed of the position and had not chased settlement of the outstanding levies to date. The proposal was made that communication would be maintained with ADMG and that the outstanding debts would be settled in full as and when there were sufficient funds in the DMG account. (**AP 1:** Maintain comms with ADMG and settle outstanding levies when required.)

TC also confirmed that he was holding the SNH grant funding of £1,800 towards HIA training and the report which was received in March 2018. This would be formally transferred to him on publication of the first HIA report for the DMG in early Summer 2019.

JMcM proposed that TC should be paid an amount to be agreed to reflect his input in helping the group move forward over the past two years, particularly with the population model, updated working plan and in meeting the requirements of the 2019 Assessment. It was agreed that this would be discussed in more detail once the outstanding subscriptions had been collected.

TC was made aware that the Brora branch of Clydesdale Bank was due to close and he confirmed that all banking for ESDMG is now undertaken through the Elgin branch and that it will be moved to internet banking shortly.

6.0 Election of Office Bearers

TC had informed the Members at the Practitioners Meeting in 22 February that he intended to stand down as Chair and had asked all to consider nominations for the positions prior to the AGM. JMcM as Chair, asked for nominations and the elections were held as follows:

- Sir Michael Wigan was duly elected as Chair
Proposed by Andrew Mackay and seconded by Brian Lyall
- Andrew Mackay was elected as Vice-Chair
Proposed by John McMorran and seconded by Andrew Nicholson
- John McMorran agreed to continue as Vice-Chair
- Tom Chetwynd was elected as Secretary
Proposed by John McMorran and seconded by George Stephenson

7.0 SNH 2019 Assessment

TC provided Members with an update on the SNH Assessment undertaken on 30 April 2019. He reported that JMcM, RR and he had attended the SNH office in Golspie and that the group had been assessed by Holly Deary and David Patterson of SNH.

Over the course of the assessment SNH had been provided with evidence, primarily in the form of an updated Working Plan to demonstrate that ESDMG was functioning satisfactorily as a DMG in accordance with Part 1: Benchmark criteria published by SNH in 2018. The key areas where improvements had been made by the group included the updated Working Plan, collaboration over deer cull apportionment and the collection of HIA data.

In terms of Part 2: Deer Management Planning, TC confirmed that evidence had also been submitted to demonstrate that significant woodland expansion had been undertaken within ESDMG, discussion had been held on HIA impact targets and on adding value to venison and larder sharing. In addition, TC also confirmed that the DMG were investigating opportunities for a joint open day with Garbh Allt Community Initiative (Gartymore) in the Helmsdale area and that a larder sheet would be circulated at the July meeting for adoption by Members. **(AP 2: Organise and circulate details of ESDMG HIA Training / Open Day.)**

HD provided a brief update on the Assessment process and how the Deer Review would unfold over the course of 2019 in that SNH will be preparing a report on deer management which will be delivered to the Environment Minister, along with the findings of the independent Deer Working Group in September 2019.

8.0 Working Plan

8.1 Mortality, Foot Counts and Recruitment – Spring 2019

TC provided an update on whole group deer count undertaken in March 2019 and presented a summary of the data submitted by Members. In preparing this summary comparisons had been made between the Spring 2019 count and the population model which is summarised in the table below:

ESDMG	Area		Spring 2019					Density
	ha.	acres	Stags	Hinds	Calves	Total	Recruit.	
NW Sub-Group Total:	39,465	97,518	1,565	1,637	449	3,651	0.27	9.3
<i>Population Model:</i>			<i>1,475</i>	<i>1,948</i>	<i>500</i>	<i>3,923</i>	<i>0.26</i>	
SE Sub-Group Total:	59,370	146,703	2,392	3,055	796	6,243	0.26	10.5
<i>Population Model:</i>			<i>3,017</i>	<i>3,062</i>	<i>789</i>	<i>6,868</i>	<i>0.26</i>	
E Sub-Group Total:	7,237	17,883	211	436	125	772	0.29	10.7
<i>Population Model :</i>			<i>220</i>	<i>370</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>690</i>	<i>0.27</i>	
			Stags	Hinds	Calves	Total	Recruit	Density
Foot Count - Spring 2019:			4,168	5,128	1,370	10,666	0.27	10.1
<i>Population Model - Spring 2019:</i>			<i>4,712</i>	<i>5,380</i>	<i>1,389</i>	<i>11,481</i>	<i>0.26</i>	<i>10.8</i>
<i>Difference:</i>			<i>-544</i>	<i>-252</i>	<i>-19</i>	<i>-815</i>	<i>0.01</i>	
<i>Percentage:</i>			<i>-0.12</i>	<i>-0.05</i>	<i>-0.01</i>	<i>-0.07</i>		

Overall, Members had counted 10,660 deer for the three sub-group areas which was approximately 7% less than the Population Model projection at 11,481 deer. The biggest variation arose against the total number of stags which showed a 12% reduction for the group against the population model, with a 21% reduction in stags counted for the SE sub-group against the population model. Conversely, the hind count for the SE sub-group was the closest in terms of a comparison against the population model with 3,055 hinds counted and 3,062 hinds projected for Spring 2019.

Discussion followed over the co-ordination of the count in that it was noted that it was dis-jointed with some estates counted before the agreed count date and the circulation of count data prior to the meeting. It was agreed that all estates would be encouraged to undertake their count on the agreed date and submit count data timeously in Spring 2020.

Further discussion followed on the publication of DMG data with some members proposing that count and cull data should be made freely available on the DMG website to display complete transparency and one member suggesting that some data may be sensitive and that the wider publication of data could be prioritised. TC agreed to circulate a mandate around owners so that they could confirm what data should be published within the public domain at what level ie whole group, sub-group or at individual property level. ***It has been noted and confirmed following the meeting that whereas the DMG aerial count data, Deer Management Plan and Minutes of Meetings are all freely available within the public domain, the DMG data relating to counts and culls at an individual property and sub-group level cannot be obtained via a FOI request and normally remains confidential to the group should the group wish to withhold that information.***

(AP 3: Circulate mandate to Owners to confirm consent of publication of DMG data)

Discussion then followed on the importance of categorising knobbers within the Spring Count with BL confirming these deer at 2 years of age will be the sporting asset in 5 to 8 year's time. RR suggested that considering the Spring Count results extreme caution should be taken in relation to the 2019-20 stag cull which was widely acknowledged by the Members present.

TC raised the issue that a currently unaccounted number of deer are lost on the railway and that he had recently been made aware that a data set existed recording deer strikes on each stretch of track and that this was updated daily. He agreed to obtain a link to this data from SNH.

(AP 4: Obtain link to train strikes on deer from SNH)

It was generally agreed that a number of other black holes still existed in terms of unaccounted stag culls within the group area, these including culls undertaken within forestry and on crofts.

(AP 5: Continue to encourage forestry owners and managers to join ESDMG as reporting members)

8.2 Habitat Monitoring

TC presented the draft HIA results for ESDMG following the collection of data from some members. Overall, 18 members had undertaken HIA monitoring and the baseline results showed that the level of browsing resulted in 95% recorded as low-medium impacts for dwarf shrub heath and 89% for blanket bog. There were several hotspots identified on the plan accompanying the draft report that were recognised by members. It was also noted that the level of trampling resulted in 67% recorded as low-medium impacts for dwarf shrub heath and 54% for blanket bog with the data processed so far and these figures would be subject to further discussion following the publishing of the final HIA report.

TC made members aware that although HIA data had been received from most there was still work to complete before the final HIA report could be published. This primarily centred around the omission of grid references on data sheets. It was also proposed that standardised data sheets for both dwarf shrub heath and blanket bog should be circulated for use by members.

(AP 6: Complete HIA report for 2018 with input from Members and circulate data sheets)

Discussion followed on the impact targets for dwarf shrub heath with the proposal that 90% low to medium would be set for browsing in designated sites and SSSIs and 80% for browsing in the wider countryside.

TC made members aware that plans for the DMG open day which would be jointly run with Garbh Allt Community Initiative (GACI) was gaining momentum and that further details would be circulated shortly. This open day would include an HIA training session and any members that had not embarked on HIA monitoring would be encouraged to attend.

8.3 Designated Features

TC reported to the group that a Steering Group meeting for Ben Klibreck SSSI had been held that morning and that the SOI had been discussed in detail. The members involved in discussions with SNH comprised Loch Choire, Vagastie (Altnaharra), Clebrig and Dalchork (Forestry & Land Scotland).

8.4 Existing & Proposed New Woodlands

No plans for new woodlands were announced over and beyond those proposed for Dalnessie and Balnacoll. TC asked that all members should make the DMG aware of proposals so that their impacts on deer management could be considered during the planning stage.

Kildonan have plans to fell and fence off an area of windblown Lodgepole pine which will have an impact on the wintering available to deer.

8.5 Peatland Restoration

No plans for further peatland restoration were announced beyond those proposed for Ben Armine and Badanloch.

8.6 Training & Competence

TC pointed out to members that a Training Matrix is now attached to the updated Working Plan and opportunities for a DMG based First Aid Course will be explored for Summer 2019.

Those members that have not commenced HIA monitoring will also be encouraged to attend the an HIA training day in June 2019.

8.7 Public Health & Well-being

TC pointed out that updated Chronic Wasting Disease guidance notes and Lyme Disease information sheets are now attached to the updated Working Plan.

8.8 Maximising Economics Benefits and Minimising Costs

TC pointed out that an Estimate of Income & Expenditure for the whole group is now attached to the updated Working Plan and will be discussed in greater detail at future meetings.

8.9 Deer Welfare

TC agreed to circulate a standardised larder sheet prior to the July Meeting and obtain details of the link to the train deer strike website.

(AP 7: Circulate standard larder sheet prior to July Meeting)

9.0 Deer Count Options for the Future

A brief discussion was held on future deer counts given the lack of certainty for future funding of aerial counts from SNH. TC confirmed that a paper was being prepared for the Practitioners Meeting in July where this would be discussed in more detail.

(AP 8: Circulate Options for Future Deer Counts paper prior to July Meeting)

10.0 Wildfire Plan

TC suggested that considering the recent Wildfires a Wildfire Plan should be prepared and attached to the Working Plan. It was agreed that this would include contact details for each estate, access arrangements and restrictions as well as details of kit that could be readily utilised for fighting wildfires. It was agreed that this would be discussed in more detail at the Practitioners Meeting in July.

(AP 9: Collect information for Wildfire Plan prior to July Meeting)

11.0 ADMG Update

TC provided a brief update on ADMG and confirmed that they continued to take an active part in the Deer Review and Sporting Rates appeal process as well as undertaking the Survey of sporting rents for Red deer stalking in Scotland.

12.0 AOCB

No points were raised.

13.0 Date of Next Meeting

It was agreed to hold a Practitioners Meeting for ESDMG on Friday 26 July at 2pm at the Golspie Inn.

**East Sutherland Deer Management Group
Practitioners Meeting**

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

14.0 Action List

Ref:	Detail	Action
1.0	Maintain comms with ADMG and settle outstanding levies when required.	Chair/Sec
2.0	Organise and circulate details of ESDMG HIA Training / Open Day at Gartymore	Sec
3.0	Circulate mandate to Owners to confirm consent of publication of DMG data	Sec
4.0	Obtain link to train strikes on deer from SNH	Sec/SNH
5.0	Continue to encourage forestry owners and managers to join ESDMG as reporting members	Sec
6.0	Complete HIA report for 2018 with input from Members and circulate data sheets	Sec
7.0	Circulate standard larder sheet prior to July Meeting	Sec
8.0	Circulate Options for Future Deer Counts paper prior to July Meeting	Sec
9.0	Collect information for Wildfire Plan prior to July Meeting	All / Sec