

East Sutherland Deer Management Group
Minutes of Meeting
Kildonan Hall, Kildonan
Tuesday 17 March 2026

Present

Present	Initials	Estate	Present	Initials	Estate
Andrew Mackay	AM	<i>Dalnessie (Chair)</i>	Martin Grant	MG	<i>Kildonan</i>
James Urquhart	JU	<i>Dunrobin Sporting</i>	Cameron Vaughan	CV	<i>Golspie</i>
Robbie Rowantree	RR	<i>Gordonbush</i>	Lucas Macrae	LM	<i>Badanloch</i>
Leigh Hague	LH	<i>Dunrobin Sporting</i>	Richard Bain	RB	<i>Richard Bain</i>
Scott Muir	SM	<i>Gordonbush</i>	John Macdoanld	JM	<i>Borrobol</i>
Alex Plommer	AP	<i>Badanloch</i>	Jon King	JK	<i>Loch Choire</i>
Andrew Robinson	Ar	<i>FLS</i>	Lorne MacNicol	LM	<i>Tressady</i>
Blair Colvin	BC	<i>Kintradwell</i>	Daniel Logie	DL	<i>Balnacoil</i>
Ali Grant	AG	<i>GACI</i>	David Shaw	JH	<i>NatureScot</i>
Pieter Bakker	PB	<i>Altnaharra</i>	David Patterson	DP	<i>NatureScot</i>
Brian Lyall	BL	<i>Badanloch</i>	Tom Chetwynd	TC	<i>Facilitator / Secretary</i>

1.0 Welcome

AM welcomed those present to the Practitioners Meeting – 2026.

2.0 Apologies

Sir Michael Wigan	Borrobol	Robert Flett	Crackaig
Matthew Johnston	Morvich	Donald Sherwood	West Garty
Megan Bregazzi	Forestry & Land Scot.	Tom Parker	Torrish
Mr & Mrs Ryan	Dalnessie	Jamie Hammond	NatureScot
Andrew Nicholson	Clebrig		

East Sutherland Deer Management Group Minutes of Meeting

3.0 Deer Culls – 2025-26 Season

The reported deer culls for ESDMG for the 2025-26 season are as follows:

Estate	Red Deer				Sika Deer			Roe Deer		
	Stags	Hinds	Calves	Total	Stags	Hinds	Calves	Bucks	Does	Kids
Dalchork - Open Hill	21	17	9	47						
Altnaharra	3	19	8	30						
Clebrig	27	70	28	125	0	0	0	0	0	0
Loch Choire - North	124	125	36	285	0	0	0	0	0	0
Loch Choire - South										
Dalnessie	29	53	14	96	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ben Armine	41	57	17	115	0	0	0	0	0	0
Badanloch	19	32	9	60	0	0	0	0	0	0
NW Sub-Group:	264	373	121	758	0	0	0	0	0	0
Borrobol	67	42	28	137						
Kildonan	72	86	22	180	0	0	0	0	0	0
Balnacoil	39	63	26	128	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dalreavoch	30	46	14	90	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tressady	84	186	87	357	4	4	1	0	2	0
Dunrobin	38	223	72	333	7	7	3	9	11	0
Gordonbush	40	70	40	150						
Kintradwell	32	30	10	72	0	0	0	0	0	0
Morvich	29	16	7	52						
SE Sub-Group:	431	762	306	1,499	11	11	4	9	13	0
West Garty	47	63	49	159						
Crackaig	36	56	19	111						
Torrish	22	61	12	95	0	0	0	0	0	0
Gartymore	23	60	14	97	0	0	0	0	0	0
E Sub-Group:	128	240	94	462	0	0	0	0	0	0
ESDMG Open Hill:	823	1,375	521	2,719	11	11	4	9	13	0

Note: This table has been updated to include additional culls reported following the Practitioners meeting

Discussion followed on the following:

- Poor condition of hinds and the poor hill conditions with heather beetle
- Low hind and calf weights and hinds not always on the ground
- Peculiar rut with low hind weights going into the rut
- Number of empty hinds and some poor deer culled left on the hill
- Hopes for a slow spring and effect on recruitment count in late Spring
- Concerns over heather beetle peaks now at 4 – 5 years
- Concerns over reduction in burning and dry summers leading to poor heather
- Increase in tick habitat and SS regeneration across open hill
- Effects of regeneration / transpiration on water tables in peatland
- Increase in sika numbers across DMG

TC reported that the DMG was within 100 deer of the proposed cull discussed in May 2025 and that all had worked hard to achieve this level, with the focus kept on hinds.

TC confirmed that he would request strike data for Network Rail and DVC data from Bear Scotland or NatureScot, as well as forestry property culls.

East Sutherland Deer Management Group
Minutes of Meeting

4.0 Mortality – Winter 2025-26

TC asked whether Practitioners had seen increased mortality over the winter and discussion followed on what had been seen, which varied across the DMG. Mortality appeared to be higher in the west than the east.

RB reported that he had identified 16 deer killed by the train at Torrish and JM reported 30 stags and 15 hinds lost on Borrobol.

There was a general feeling that mortality would increase before the May meeting.

Discussion followed on peaks in mortality over hard winters, average mortality in the population model, declining vegetation quality following restrictions in muirburn and poor hind cohorts following periods of hard winter.

Discussion also followed on vegetation diversity and quality, the use of prescribed burning for wildfire mitigation and improvement and those trained for muirburn, these including BL, DL and LM. A muirburn course will be arranged within the DMG for October 2026 with training provided by Brightspark.

DS mentioned that HIA methodology was being looked at as part of a research project which would be progressed in Spring 2026. He also mentioned that WHIA training courses are due to be run in Spring 2026.

5.0 Foot Count – Spring 2026

TC confirmed that the East sub-group had already counted with the data reported to the DMG.

It was agreed that the foot count for the rest of the DMG would be undertaken on Monday 23 and Tuesday 24 March with AP as the co-ordinator for NW sub-group and DL for SE sub-group.

It was agreed that the count would identify stags, knobbers, hind and calves separately, wherever possible.

6.0 Population Model

TC reported that he would provide a full update on the population model at the Spring Meeting.

A further survey will be circulated prior to the meeting to include a recruitment count figure.

East Sutherland Deer Management Group
Minutes of Meeting

7.0 Habitat Monitoring

Borrobol, Alltnaharra, Clebrig, Gordonbush and Dalnessie are proposing to undertake HIA in Spring / Summer 2026.

TC encouraged members to consider undertaking HIA in future.

Discussion followed about the viability of HIA on crofted areas, such as Tressady, where upto 300 sheep/km² could be present.

8.0 Training Requirements

Agreed that training would be undertaken for muirburn to comply with licencing requirements.

It was proposed that ESDMG should nominate a member to act as ADMG representative and Leigh Hague was proposed.

9.0 Woodland Expansion & Peatland Restoration Schemes

No further schemes proposed

10.0 ADMG Report

TC reported that the Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill passed by SG on 29 January 2026, which now includes:

- Increased powers for NS to manage deer populations, including s.6ZB
- Ministers to publish a National Deer Management Plan and a Venison Plan
- Occupiers Rights – expanded to include crofters and agricultural tenants, which will require further consultation and secondary legislation

The ADMG AGM will be held at Kingsmills Hotel, Inverness on Wednesday 25 March 2026

TC advised that members should apply for SBBS relief for Non-Domestic Rates by ticking “environmental management” within the claim form.

SQWV will be attending the May meeting to present on the relaunch and benefits of the scheme.

**East Sutherland Deer Management Group
Minutes of Meeting**

11.0 NatureScot Report

DS deliver a report on the following:

- Register of authorised persons under NE bill, which is probably 2 years away, and will require discussion with ADMG, detail to be published,
- Deer in Helmsdale, reported as a nuisance with complaints from residents and also in terms of DVCs on A9 between Caithness – Lothbeg. To date 37 hinds and calves have been culled, predominantly in the NDMG / Navidale area
- Loch Choire is subject to a SLC appeal, which has been cisted to end of March, NS continuing to negotiate a potential move from s.8 to s.7 - post-season meeting will be held with NW sub-group members in April 2026.
- There will be no immediate helicopter count or SCM for LC and the outcome remains density driven to 7.5/km
- TC asked for greater comms to maintain member engagement in Ben Klibreck SSSI
- LC is not using the Deer App for cull recording and continues to manual record.

12.0 AOCB

DS confirmed that a drone count is proposed for the Torrish Woodlands.

13.0 Date of Spring Meeting

The Spring Meeting will be held on Thursday 7 May 2026 at Kildonan Hall.