

Paper 2017/4 a&b Minutes & MA

Meeting of Affric and Kintail Deer Management Group Held at Forestry Commission Scotland, Smithton 18th April 2017

Present

Willie Fraser
Peter Urquhart
John Hay
Chris Macleod
Willie Lamont
Ian Reynard
Sinclair Coghill
Linzi Seivwright

Estates/Agency

Chair/NTS
East Benula South
Mullardoch
North Affric
FES
Wester Guisachan
SNH
Secretary

1. Apologies.

Derick Macaskill	FES
Donald Fraser	East Benula North
Angus Hughes	East Benula South
David Matthews	North Affric
Nout Kwint	Wester Guisachan
Andrew Slaughter	Inverinate

2. Draft Minutes of Meeting held on 31st October 2016.

These were approved (subject to a change of a target of 25 stags for North Affric).

It was also agreed that in future meeting Agendas should be circulated more widely to include Paul Stirling (the Community Council representative) and Wester Guisachan.

3. Matters Arising.

AP	Action	Who
1	Publish Minutes and Agendas on the Web. This had been actioned.	LS
2	Details of Training Course to be circulated to Group. Willie Fraser was still to firm up a date for a first aid course.	WF
3 & 4	Email confirming change of name and sign-off of plan circulated to Group. The Group members present agreed to formally sign off Parts 1 and 2 of the plan.	LS
5	Group to be told of any OOS Authorisation granted and consideration to be given to NOT shooting good, mature stags where possible. FE had circulated details of an OOS authorisation around Christmas but due to an error this had not been circulated to the Group until later. WF apologised for the error in communication and the Group agreed that in future OOS applications would be brought to the attention of the Group.	FE
6	Strathglass Complex HIA to be circulated to the Group. Sinclair Coghill indicated that the Group had previously received a couple of summary maps and provided the Group with a hard copy of the Final HIA at the meeting. The file itself is too large to email but SC indicated that he was going to find a way to publish the copy of the SNH website and	SNH

	<p>a link would be posted on the Affric and Kintail DMG web page to ensure all those had access to it. The results of the HIA were discussed and SC indicated that on the whole, impacts were going in the right direction and most of the impacts were falling within target limits, particularly within the Affric and Kintail DMG area. It was indicated that most of the higher impacts were to be found north of Loch Mullardoch. It was noted that where high impacts had been recorded on North Affric, these were close to supplementary feeding sites. SC indicated that although the results suggested that there was more work to do, the overall target density for the Group (8.2 deer per km²) was considered to be sufficient for the time being. North of Loch Affric, the Group were aiming for a target density of 13 deer per km². Significant reduction culls would be taking place given that the count had indicated a higher than anticipated/predicted population. Overall, the recent South Ross deer count had highlighted the importance of counting on a bigger scale and that deer movements were likely happening out with and across current DMG boundaries.</p> <p>WF congratulated the Group members on their efforts to date in achieving an overall reduction in impacts and emphasised the importance and significance of being able to demonstrate that Affric and Kintail was moving forward positively as a Group and delivering action on the ground.</p> <p>There followed a discussion about the distribution of survey points across the SAC and SC explained the survey methodology in detail. It was emphasised that the same number and distribution of points had been used in the repeat survey to ensure directly comparable results. A set of plots had been established for each estate to make the results statistically robust at the estate level. Habitat types had been stratified and mapped and then points generated for each estate. This is why it appeared that for some estates, plots appeared in relatively small areas or clusters – but this simply reflected the distribution of habitat.</p>	
7	<p>Circulate amended Project Plan and Timetable. Due to uncertainty with ECAF and the possibility of funds becoming available from SNH to assist with delivery of DMPs (they have received £175K interim funding for 2017), the Group was awaiting further information about what funds might be available to support some of the original work detailed in the ECAF application before amending the project plan. This would still be on the basis of 50% contribution from the Group. The fund was also potentially going to be used to progress SWARD and further projects within ADMG. SC also mentioned that there may be an opportunity for some training later in the year with regards to use of helicopters to support collaborative culling i.e dropping teams in inaccessible areas and carcass retrieval. This would be in relation to supporting reduction cull efforts required to reduce impacts on the Strathglass Complex SAC.</p>	LS/WF

4. Election of Office Bearers

WF offered to stand down as Chairman and Treasurer if someone else was willing to take on either roles. Following discussion WF was duly elected as Chairman (Proposed by JH and seconded by PU). WF agreed to continue to act also as Treasurer for the Group.

WF reported that there was approximately £3,709.20 in the bank –having paid ADMG subscriptions of £2.5K. Subscriptions had been calculated on the original basis that the Group was going to receive ECAF funding. It was indicated that some further subscriptions might be sought this year if Grant funding from SNH was not available. WF agreed to provide an update on the Group accounts and LS to agree fees for ongoing Secretarial work and additional facilitation work for the Group.

Action Point 1: WF

The Group was also reminded that there was an agreement in principle that the South Ross area would be counted again by helicopter in 2019 with all 5 DMGs taking part. At present the Group were working on the assumption that 100% of costs would be met by the Group and if assistance is available then that would be bonus. The recent political interest in the future of deer management was certainly pointing to more emphasis being put on landowners to deliver more in terms of counts and habitat management.

5. Culls, recruitment counts 2016/17 & Public Interest (Working Plan)

Paper: 2017/2

LS introduced the Draft Working Plan for 2017/18. LS highlighted that the key to setting effective culls and cull targets for the Group was to consider the most effective boundaries for the Group area. At present it was recognised that the existing Affric and Kintail boundary did not reflect deer movements and that in order for population modelling to be effective, this would require the inclusion of Corriclair (to the south of South Affric) and Inverinate and West Benula. The Group agreed that the population model for Affric and Kintail DMG should include Inverinate and Corriclair. WF agreed to approach both Corriclair and Inverinate estates to discuss.

Action Point 2: WF

The Group was informed that the Chairs of Glenmoriston and Affric and Kintail had met that morning with WL from Forest Enterprise to discuss DMG boundaries and opportunities for a greater collaborative approach to deer management. WL made it clear that until the current contract on South Affric expires, there is little opportunity at present but he indicated that FE would be starting to look at future deer management options towards the end of 2017 in plenty time to have something in place when the contract finally ends in 2018/19. FE would be approaching direct neighbours of South Affric in due course to discuss potential options.

To improve the accuracy of the Population model the Group agreed to conduct recruitment counts by the end April. This simply involves recording the number of hinds to calves in a handful of sample groups. WF reported that this year, he was recording hind:calf ratios of 35% with zero mortality.

Action Point 3: DMG members

The Group agreed in principle that they would have no objection to individual members taking part in a training exercise using helicopters to assist with culling operations should the opportunity become available. It was emphasised that participation in such training was purely voluntary and at the discretion of individual estates.

With regards to the setting of culls for 2017/18, LS agreed to amend the population models in the Working plan and the Group agreed to meet in June (20th) to agree final cull targets. FE indicated that they would require more information to inform their culls however, some Estates indicated that they would in principle propose the following culls:

Property	Stag Cull 2017	Hind 2017/18	Cull
East Benula South	15	25	
North Affric	25	25	
Mullardoch	12	6	
NTS Kintail	100	100	
NTS West Affric	50	80	
NFE Strathglass	TBA	TBA	
NFE Fasnakyle	TBA	TBA	
NFE Glen Na Ciche & NFE Affric Enclosures	TBA	TBA	
NFE South Affric	TBA	TBA	

The Group discussed progress with meeting the Public Interest Actions detailed in the Working Plan. There were several actions (mostly with regards to woodlands) where progress had been halted due to uncertainty with ECAF funding. It was agreed that the most pressing action was the undertaking of Habitat Impact Assessment across the Group (lack of progress of DMGs undertaking Habitat Monitoring had been an issue that had been the focus of criticism from the recent Review of Deer Management carried out by SNH and the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee). The Group agreed to undertake monitoring this summer and to provide LS with results so that she could produce a summary map of impacts for the Group.

Action Point 4: DMG Members

6. Out of Season Authorisations

The Group discussed the issue of Out of Season Authorisations. It was acknowledged that the issue was always likely to be a contentious one and that not everyone agreed with the principle however it was recognised that for some Authorisations were a necessary management tool to enable culls (particularly reduction culls) to be met. The question was asked that if culls cannot be met in season, surely that means that culls are being set too high?

The issue of deer movements and seasonal distribution of deer was discussed. FE indicated that in the case of South Affric, this is largely stag wintering ground. They indicated that they are happy to tolerate stags in this area but only up to a certain density. In theory they could shoot a lot more stags in this area at a time when they are doing most damage but they had refrained from doing this in order to work with the Group and fit in with the collaborative plans of the Group. The Group were encouraged to consider how best they could manage their own populations in order to attract stags away from South Affric.

NTS indicated that they were aware that the population of deer in the west was likely to have most impact on the Group and as a result were committed to setting and achieving higher than normal culls. Mild weather had made hind culling extremely difficult the past season and therefore they had been forced to use an extension to the hind season to try and meet culls. They were aware that this was a contentious issue and therefore had only used the Authorisation up until the end of February. NTS also indicated that they would be looking to start the stag cull on the 1st June and to start the hind cull early on the 1st October. They also wished to make the Group aware that whilst every attempt would be made to achieve the hind

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cull, they may have to consider the use of an extension to the season (to end of Feb) next year also. NTS would also be considering the use of helicopter assistance if the opportunity became available.

JH explained that Mullardoch had routinely asked for an Out of Season Authorisation for stags as an insurance policy to protect the unfenced pinewoods (which are designated) but that this had rarely been used.

The Group agreed that the main thing was the need for openness and transparency moving forwards and that the intention to use Authorisations should be discussed with the Group as far in advance as possible. It was important that protocols are followed, particularly with regards to circulating information when Authorisations come to the Group.

The issue of collaboration was raised and Wester Guisachan indicated that they had struggled to achieve their stag cull this year towards the end of September/October when stags were sitting over the march on the high ground in South Affric. FE indicated that they would be willing to meet with their neighbouring properties to discuss this situation.

Action Point 5: Forest Enterprise

NTS indicated that they already have a collaborative arrangement with North Affric Estate but that they were always willing to explore ideas and opportunities for further collaboration in order that everyone's objectives could be met. The Group was encouraged to continue to explore further opportunities.

7. DMG Schedule, Costs & Subscriptions (including Funding Update)

This item was discussed under Item 4.

8. Habitat Impact Assessment Methodology (Paper: 2017/3)

LS had circulated a paper outlining the methodology for conducting Habitat Impact Assessments. In order to assist members, LS suggested that there may be a possibility of joining Glen Strathfarrar DMG with a training exercise they were undertaking at Braulen on 2nd May. LS agreed to speak to Glen Strathfarrar DMG to arrange and to provide Group members with maps and coordinates of random points. **(Note since the meeting this has been postponed – date to be confirmed)**

Action Point 6: LS

9. Treasurer's Report

This item was discussed under Item 4.

10. SNH Update (including SAC habitat report).

This item was discussed under Item 3.

11. ADMG Update

The Group were updated that the Review of Deer Management had been carried out by SNH last autumn and Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee had held a series of evidence sessions involving a range of stakeholders including SNH, ADMG and Scientific Advisors. At the beginning of April the ECCLR Committee had published a series of recommendations largely supporting a more regulated system of deer management with SNH setting culls and landowners taking more responsibility for providing information on populations and habitat impacts. The Minister for the Environment was now considering these recommendations and there is due to be a debate in the Scottish Parliament on 2nd May.

12. Other DMG Update

It was reported under Item 5 that the Chairs of Glenmoriston and Affric and Kintail had met that morning with WL from Forest Enterprise to discuss DMG boundaries and opportunities for a greater collaborative approach to deer management. The annual meeting of the South Ross DMGs is due to take place on 10th of May at Attadale Estate.

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13. Any Other Business

JH reported to the Group that he had recently entered into an Agreement with FCS to fence a further two small pinewood exclosures (4 ha and 10 ha) on Mullardoch in order to bring the designated site closer to being in Favourable Condition.

North Affric reported that there was a proposal being looked at for 7 small exclosures to be erected in partnership with Trees for Life.

The Group discussed opportunities to hold both a site visit (largely aimed at Group members) and a public event to raise awareness of deer management issues. It was agreed that May 2018 would be a good time to hold a public event, possibly in Glen Affric and would give plenty lead in time for an event to be organised.

14. Date of Next Meeting

The Group will meet on **June 20th 2017**– venue and time to be agreed.

4b. Matters Arising/ Summary of Actions

AP	Action	Who
1	WF to provide an up to date report of Group accounts.	WF
2	Corriclair and Inverinate Estates to be approached regarding inclusion in the A&K population model and setting of culls.	WF
3	DMG members to carry out a recruitment count by end of April and email results to LS/WF	DMG members
4	Group members to undertake Habitat Monitoring for Blanket Bog and Dwarf Shrub Heath	DMG members
5	Forest Enterprise to meet with neighbouring properties to discuss deer movements.	FE
6	Maps and coordinates of random plots to be circulated to members and a training day organised, possibly in conjunction with Glen Strathfarrar DMG	LS