

## Present

Willie Fraser  
Angus Hughes  
Chris Macleod  
Mark Macleod  
John Hay  
Russell Cooper  
Sinclair Coghill  
Aaron Mathieson  
Linzi Seivwright

## Estates/Agency

Chair/NTS  
East Benula South  
North Affric  
North Affric  
Mullardoch  
FES  
SNH  
Inverinate Estate  
Secretary

## Minutes

## Action

### 1 Welcome & Apologies

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting and introduced Aaron Mathieson who was representing Inverinate Estate.

There were apologies from:

|                |                   |
|----------------|-------------------|
| Ian Reynard    | Wester Guisachan  |
| David Matthews | North Affric      |
| Peter Urquhart | East Benula South |
| Lynda Campbell | Corrielaire       |

### 2 Draft Minutes of Meeting of held on 6<sup>th</sup> August 2018

Paper: 2017/4a

AH raised an amendment under Item 10 that he had spotted signs of Feral Pigs at the top of Glen Urquhart.

Subject to that amendment, the minutes were approved by RC and seconded by CM.

### 3 Matters Arising from Meeting held on 6<sup>th</sup> August 2018

Paper: 2017/4b

| AP | Action  | Who                  | Progress  |
|----|---|----------------------|---|
| 1  | LS to check with RC if there are shapefiles for exclosures in S Affric. LS to map exclosures and culls by species.  | LS/RC                | <i>LS had received maps and was to complete Map of culls.</i>   |
| 2  | The Group agreed to provide coordinates for all deer shot. LS to produce proforma data sheet – RC to send a copy of one used by Forest Enterprise. The Group also agreed to keep records of larder weights for all carcasses. | LS, RC & DMG Members | <i>Discussed under Item 14. LS to provide proforma sheet for circulation to Group</i>                       |
| 3  | Issue of access to Loch Mullardoch to be discussed with SSE.  | JH                   | <i>Meeting had been arranged -JH to make contact with Andrew Slaughter at Inverinate regarding meeting.</i> |

|   |  |                  |   |
|---|--|------------------|---|
| 4 | Members to carry out foot count of stags asap and before end of August. WF to discuss spring count with Inverinate and Corriclair. | WF & DMG Members | <i>Count completed. Spring count discussed under Agenda item 4.</i> |
| 5 | Members to provide HIA data to LS for a report for November meeting.   | LS & DMG Members | <i>Data received and discussed under Agenda Item 8.</i>             |
| 6 | LS to contact SQWV to arrange a possible free inspection for members.  | LS               | <i>Discussed under Item 10.</i>                                     |
| 7 | SC to circulate information on Beavers to the Group.   | SC               | <i>Actioned 5/11/18.</i>  |
| 8 | LS to circulate details of a Meat Hygiene Course.  | LS               | <i>Discussed under Item 9.</i>                                      |

## 4. Working Plan

### 4.1 Updated Population Model, Culls Updates & Cull Setting 18/19

LS updated the Group on the latest version of the population model in the Working Plan which indicated that the Group had likely now dipped below the population target of 7.5 deer per km<sup>2</sup> as originally set in the DMP. LS also indicated that future culls from this point on should be carefully planned and considered as they could have a significant impact on the population moving forward.

The stag count figures collected by the Group in late summer 2018 were discussed and it was noted that the Group count had come up with a figure significantly lower than the model had predicted. Further investigation of figures has also indicated a significant increase in the stag cull in the Strathglass Enclosure and the S Affric Enclosures.

RC was asked for his thoughts on whether it was possible the stags from the open ground could have gotten into the enclosures and accounted for the increase in stag culls. RC explained that **there was every likelihood the stags in the South Affric enclosures from the open hill. As the Fasnakyle fence had been under snow for so long, it was possible that stags from the open hill had found their way into the Strathglass enclosure.**

CM commented that it was likely that the Group target had been met already some time back.

Following discussion the Group members agreed the following actions:

- LS was asked to map cull data received from RC
- Inverinate to keep Group members informed of winter count as members will try and coordinate foot counts where possible. Inverinate to report count data to DMG as soon as available.
- As well as a possible partial count in winter, Group members agreed to coordinate a ground count in Spring 2019 (between mid Feb to mid March)
- FE to count South Affric regularly over the winter and to update the Group on the environmental targets/direction that FE will take in future, which may see population targets altered if the long term objective is for native woodland regeneration out with fenced areas over time.
- Cull targets require to be set by all in advance. Currently the population would appear to be at the agreed level and likely lower according to the population model. The point was made, that to drive the population lower may have a detrimental impact on the Group's ability to continue to harvest deer sustainably.

1. LS
2. Inverinate
3. Members
4. FE
5. ALL

There followed a discussion about hind cull targets.

**NFE Fasnakyle:** RC indicated that on the basis of the favourable habitat impact assessment results of Heath and Blanket Bog which showed mainly absent or low browsing impacts, that they would be looking to take a maintenance cull of hinds based on their count figures from late summer. RC indicated that there was likely a shared population of deer with Mullardoch comprising two main herds of hinds plus additional wintering stags, **and** that due to the nature of the ground, favoured the Fasnakyle side of the hill.

RC indicated that he would be carrying out counts over winter. The long-term objective was for woodland but that he would ask the environmental department for information about habitat objectives and where the population needed to be. The indications from the HIA report suggested that impacts were at a low level. RC asked LS to provide an idea of what figures would be required as a maintenance cull.

6. LS

It was commented that such low levels of browsing may affect to regeneration of woodlands in the future.

**NFE South Affric:** The Group discussed that there was some movement of hinds between North and South Affric. FE indicated that the hind cull on S Affric would be taken from hinds on the march with Corriclair and that this was unlikely to affect the Group. RC agreed to discuss with North Affric which Groups of hinds to lay light on.

7. RC/CM

RC indicated that he was concerned that if they were too light on hinds in South Affric, this would lead to deer moving into the area. RC assured the Group that we would be instructing contractors to hard hinds only on the marches with Corriclair.

The Chair agreed to arrange a meeting with Corriclair (even by VC or Skype if more convenient) and LS was instructed to produce a revised population model in light of information putting recruitment and calving rates at 10%

8. WF/LS

It was reported that W Guisachan were keeping records of all deer seen on the ground and RC reported that he would be doing the same.

**Mullardoch:** JH explained that he felt that in terms of the shared population with Fasnakyle, he had concerns that over the 40 years he had been involved in the estate he was seeing significant changes in the behaviour of deer. He had been keeping records of all deer observations on the ground throughout the season and over 22 days stalking had recorded a total of 111 stags, 589 hinds – 700 sightings in total which averaged out at 32 deer per outing. JH indicated that he would not be shooting hinds this winter in order to allow hind numbers to build up slightly, having hit them quite hard in the past.

**North Affric:** CM reported that hinds were in particularly poor condition on the hill and that recruitment from last year and this year was likely to be as low as 10% - this essentially represented two cohorts of the population that had been affected by the poor winter. North Affric was normally a static population but CM had seen changes in the population and that the Group had likely dipped below the target some time ago.

The Group discussed proposed hind culls.

| Property            | Stags   | Hinds       |
|---------------------|---------|-------------|
| Fasnakyle           | 20      | Maintenance |
| S Affric            | 66      | ?           |
| N Affric            | 18      | 20 max      |
| Mullardoch          | 9       | 0           |
| Inverinate Forest   | 20      | TBA         |
| Inverinate W Benula | 40      | TBA         |
| East Benula South   | 8       | TBA         |
| Corriclair          | ?       | 30?         |
| West Affric         | 38 (24) | 60 max      |
| Kintail             | 67      | 80          |

The Group had a discussion about future opportunities for members from the local community to carry out contract work on NFE in Glen Affric. RC reported that the previous Framework for contractors had ended on 1<sup>st</sup> November but that the new Framework would not be ready until next year. In the interim, tenders had been advertised until August 2019 to cover the interim period. RC didn't know when tenders for the Framework would be advertised to get on the National Framework. Scotland would be divided 5 discrete regions and successful contractors would be able to get on a maximum of two regions. There would be a maximum of 10 contractors in each region. The region relevant for Affric would be the Kingussie to North of Scotland.

In order to be successful, candidates will have to be able to demonstrate competency and experience for all those taking part in operations. As a minimum applicants will be expected to have DSC Levels 1 & 2, First Aid, Quad training and be on the SNH Fit and Competent Register. Competency can also be demonstrated through your own experience.

There was still uncertainty as to whether deer control will be under a Contract or a Permission. RC said he would have consider where FE would be going with a Permission.

The Chair indicate that it would help the Group if there was less reliance on contractors to carry out deer control and this would give greater transparency to the Group. There was a greater opportunity for the local community to be involved in deer management if a Permission were to be issued.

RC made it clear that even if a Lease/Permission was issued in the future, FE would still be responsible for stipulating what was required to be shot and where and that it would be managed in the same way as a Contract. For example, if there was influx of stags over the winter, the Permission holders would still be instructed to cull them.

It was discussed that there needed to be more strategic discussion of the use of contracts/permissions particularly in light of the SNH requirement that deer management should be inclusive and sustainable encompassing employment, welfare and the environment. Estate objectives also have to be considered.

RC also indicated that currently there were no other options for deer management and that any deviation from the current system would need to be a Scottish Government decision.

## 4.2 Spring Count

It was agreed that the Group would carry out a complete foot count of the DMG area in the Spring 2019. Dates would be tied down in January but likely to be anytime from 15<sup>th</sup> feb to mid-March.

9. ALL

## 4.3 Mid-Term Review of Plan

10. LS

It was agreed that the Group would carry out a mid-term review of the Plan and that a meeting to be held (jointly with Glen Strathfarrar possibly) to update the local Community on progress with delivery. A progress report would be produced for the Website.

## 5. DMH Health Check

LS had circulated a draft Health Check that had been carried out by the Chair, Secretary with JH present. The Health Check was based on the SNH Assessment criteria and overall it was reported that the Group was moving in a positive direction. The main outstanding areas of work related to Habitat Impact Assessment which the Group had agreed to repeat in Spring. There were also outstanding actions relating to woodlands and peatlands but these would be covered by the Forest Cooperation Grant Project being carried out the Malcolm Morrison and the Group had received confirmation in principle that the Peatland Feasibility application submitted in May 2018 would be approved (subject to some additional information required).

The Group would also need to gather some additional information to support welfare objectives. The Group agreed to provide larder data (stags and yearling hinds) in order to look at trends over time.

## 6. Woodland Review Project Update

The Group had been successful in securing Malcolm Morrison to conduct a Woodland Survey of the DMG area. This would be a strategic review of woodland/forestry within the DMG area which would look at current condition as well as identifying opportunities for future woodland expansion. MM would be beginning the work at the start of October, and was hoping to have the work completed by the end of May 2019.

## 7. Peatland Restoration Update

An application had been approved in principle and the Group was now required to get three quotes to carry out the work. SNH reported that there was likely to be an opening for applications for further work to complete the work coming up soon.

## 8. DMG Habitat Monitoring Update

LS was going to complete a baseline report using current HIA data which along with the results of the SAC monitoring carried out in 2016, would provide a baseline and full coverage of the impacts across the Group area. The Group agreed to carry out repeat monitoring across the whole DMG in Spring 2019.

11. LS/ALL

## 9. Training. Larder Hygiene. First Aid Training

The larder hygiene course had already been organised by AH who would check availability and see if there were spaces free. Provisional dates for First Aid training at North Affric were 3/4<sup>th</sup> December (to be confirmed).

12. AH

## 10. SQWV and Venison Production

The Group indicated that they would be interested in taking up the offer from SQWV of a free larder inspection. WF to get addresses from members and contact SQWV to organise.

13. WF

## 11. Cultural and Historic Features

WF agreed to send a report on archaeological features in Kintail to LS.

14. WF

## 12. Invasive Species Update

An adult wild boar had been sighted at Struy and in Tomich. A few had been seen on Inverinate. North Affric reported 1 Sika stag.

## 13. Community Engagement

The Group would be organising a meeting with the local community in Spring 2019.

## 14. Deer Welfare

Deer welfare would be monitored in future using the proposed data sheets which would be circulated to the group. It was reported that some fences had been removed at Allt na Mhullich. This would need to be mapped. RC to provide information.

15. RC

## 15. Access Issues

The Group discussed ongoing access issues with FCS and Curran Mhor. FE had moved the gate as agreed but this was now locked.

## 16. Out of Season Authorisations

Mullardoch reported that they apply annually for an Authorisation but rarely have to use it and is for emergency purposes only. WF to check with RC as to situation with Authorisations.

16. WF

## 17. Treasurer's Report

WF indicated that there was £4687.62 in the back -the result of the helicopter count contributions made by the Group previously. There would be anticipated expenditure to cover ADMG subs and Secretarial expenses of £1539. No other outgoings.

## 18. SNH Update

SNH reported that they would be undertaking the DMH Assessment in April/May 2019 the results of which would be reported to Ministers in late Autumn. The Deer Working Group (whose Chair Dr Simon Pepper has sadly suddenly passed away) is due to report to the Minister by the end of April and that a report may be published in June. Dr Andrew Barbour had taken over the Chair.

## 19. ADMG Update

There would be a Regional Meeting of ADMG to be held in Inverness on 21<sup>st</sup> November at the Kingsmills Hotel.

## 20. Other DMG Update

There was nothing to report.

## 21. AGM -Appointment of Office Bearers

WF was reappointed as the Chair (proposed by CM and seconded by MM)  
WF was appointed as the Treasurer (proposed by MM and seconded by JH)

## 22. Any Other Business

There was no other business raised.

## 23. Dates of Next Meetings

11<sup>th</sup> March 2019 at 10.30 (NTS Balnain TBC)

10<sup>th</sup> May 2019 DMH Assessment. Venue TBC All welcome to attend.

## Summary of Action Points from 5<sup>th</sup> November 2018

| Action Point | Description  | Who               |
|--------------|--|-------------------|
| 1            | LS to map cull data received from RC   | LS                |
| 2            | Inverinate to keep Group members informed of winter count as members try and coordinate foot counts where possible. Inverinate to report count data to DMG as soon as available. | INVERINATE        |
| 3            | As well as a possible partial count in winter, Group members to coordinate a ground count in Spring 2019 (between mid Feb to mid March)  | ALL MEMBERS       |
| 4            | FE to count South Affric regularly over the winter and update the Group on the environmental targets/direction that FE will take in future.                                      | FE                |
| 5            | Culls to be agreed in advance.   | ALL MEMBERS       |
| 6            | LS to provide an idea of what figures would be required as a maintenance cull on Fasnakyle.  | LS                |
| 7            | RC to discuss with North Affric which Groups of hinds to lay light on  | RC                |
| 8            | WF to arrange a meeting with Corriclair  | WF                |
| 9            | Group to carry out a complete foot count of the DMG area in the Spring 2019. Dates will be tied down in January but likely to be anytime from 15 <sup>th</sup> Feb to mid-March. | ALL MEMBERS       |
| 10           | Complete Mid Term Review of plan and organise Community Meeting by Spring 2019   | LS                |
| 11           | LS to complete HIA baseline report<br>Group members to carry out repeat monitoring Spring 209  | LS<br>ALL MEMBERS |
| 12           | AH to check availability of spaces on larder hygiene course  | AH                |
| 13           | WF to get addresses from members and contact SQWV to organise  | WF                |
| 14           | WF to send a report on archaeological features to LS.  | WF                |
| 15           | RC to provide information on fence removal   | RC                |
| 16           | WF to check with RC as to situation with Authorisations.   | WF                |