

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE EASTER ROSS DEER
MANAGEMENT GROUP, HELD ON FRIDAY 19th February AT 2PM AT
MIDFEARN LODGE, ARDGAY.**

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Present:

Mr Charlie Brooke	(Chairman)	Midfearn Estate
Mr Calum Beattie		Gledfield Estate
Mr Michael Brown		Midfearn Estate
Mr Jim Gilmour		Gruinards Estate
Mr Richard Harington	(Vice Chairman)	Strathrusdale Estate
Mr Alastair Harington		Strathrusdale Estate
Mr Kim Sawyer		Dounie Estate

In attendance:

Mr David Campbell (Management Plan)
Mr Sinclair Coghill (SNH)
Mr Gordon Robertson (Secretary and Treasurer)

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Neil Cameron (Gledfield), Jamie Sawyer (Dounie)

2. Chairman's introduction

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the Meeting.

3. Minutes of Meeting held on 2.10.2015

The Minutes of the meeting held on the 2nd October 2015, previously circulated, were approved.

4. Action points from previous meeting.

- The Secretary confirmed that a new Bank Account had been opened with the Royal Bank of Scotland. The Signatories are the Chairman, Richard Harington and the Secretary/Treasurer. Any cheques must have two signatures.

- Michael Brown (MB) will assess the need for a further visit by Nikki Dayton to carry out Habitat Monitoring. It is hoped that estate staff can carry out this task.
- MB is working with SNH to encourage the production of Certificates from SNH to acknowledge the training undertaken by estate staff in habitat monitoring. Ongoing.
- The Constitution for the ERDMG had been completed and approved by Group members. It will be attached to the Website when operational.
- The Secretary will continue to seek a response from the Danish Landowner within the Group area to invite him to become a member.

5. Election of Vice-Chairman

The Constitution requires that a Vice-Chairman is elected. Following a full discussion it was unanimously agreed that Alastair Harington should be appointed to this position. This was proposed by Jim Gilmour (JG) and seconded by Kim Sawyer (KS).

6 Deer Management Plan.

The Chairman thanked David Campbell (DC) for all the work that he had carried out on behalf of the ERDMG, in order to prepare the Draft Deer Management Plan.

DC presented the Draft Plan and a second document highlighting a Working Plan with clear Action Points. These include the need for

1. A clear definition of the ERDMG's boundaries which will be regularly reviewed.
2. Planned Meetings to include local stakeholders, Community leaders, Police and Governmental Agencies and any others with an interest in deer management.
3. Ratification of the Constitution at the Spring meeting.
4. Completion of the Deer Management Plan. This Plan had undergone a benchmarking process with SNH and is now near to approval. The Plan will require ongoing input and analysis.
5. Adherence to the Code of Practice on Deer Management which will be delivered through the implementation of the Deer Management Plan.
6. A Collaborative approach to deer management.
7. Best Practice Guidelines to be followed
8. Annual Deer Counts.

9. Accurate recording of annual culls.
10. Regular Habitat monitoring as agreed with SNH to manage the impact of deer in the wider environment.
11. Ongoing training of staff.
12. A Review of Carcass handling and Venison marketing.
13. An improved Communication strategy.
14. The delivery of Public Interest Outcomes.
15. The improvement of ecosystems to improve carbon capture.
16. The control of non-native invasive species.
17. The protection of historic features and landscapes.
18. The optimisation of economic benefits of deer management.

DC thanked Sinclair Coghill (SC) of SNH for his input and guidance during the benchmarking process. SC confirmed that the plan had reached the stage where the Secretary could now complete the paperwork in order to receive the grant of 50% of the cost of the plans production. **Action GR.**

DC stressed the importance of the Plan and the changes in management practices set out therein. There are 44 upland Deer Management Groups in Scotland and all are undertaking the same process of change. DMG's all have to demonstrate the good work that they currently undertake, and there is no doubt that if they were to fail, that Government would intervene and take control of the decision making process.

SC highlighted the progress that had been made in the last 18 months. The Plan has now advanced to the point where it is acceptable to SNH. DC and SC stressed that the plan will continue to evolve and that it contains numerous commitments that must be followed through. (See list above). Monitoring will continue from within the DMG and by SNH to ensure delivery.

The location and format for the Spring Meeting was discussed at length. It was agreed that the next meeting would take place at Midfearn Lodge and that the Community Councils, Local Councillors and MSP will be informed, along with the Statutory Authorities, the Forestry Commission and Ardgay Game. **Action GAR**

Once the Plan is completed, the Secretary will ensure that the Plan is placed on the new Website and that the local Press are informed. **Action GAR**

7 Membership of DMG

The existing and the potential future membership of the Group were discussed. It was agreed that the Forestry Commission should be included. MB and KS pointed out that some absentee owners (non members) within the group appear not to fully appreciate the relevance of the Deer Management Plan and its commitment to Good Practice.

DC highlighted the need for a collaborative approach to the administration of the Group as the whole functioning of the Group would be in jeopardy if individual estates chose to pull out.

Information exchange will be vital, and Chairman confirmed that the Secretary will circulate all relevant documents to Members, and where appropriate the wider public. KS, JG and CB all confirmed that the owners of their estates trusted them to represent their interests at meetings.

It was agreed that DMG boundary would be looked at again.

Action all.

8. Deer Count

The Plan commits the Group to undertaking regular Deer Counts. SC confirmed that SNH will take the lead with recording when the helicopter count is undertaken. The personnel on the aircraft would comprise,

Pilot

Navigator

Camera man

SC (SNH)

Estate worker (changes during the operation)

All estate staff indicated their willingness to assist. In the first instance MB would be called upon, then DC and then CB. This may change.

CB informed SC that there are presently some 400 deer on the low ground at Gledfield. This is an area not normally counted. SC also asked for details of 'tight fences', as this information would be helpful during the count.

The Chairman asked that a date for the Count was fixed as soon as possible. It is estimated that the cost of the count will be £3,000.

After considerable discussion, it was agreed that the cost of the count should be shared equally between members, as the Count was a requirement of Deer

Management Plan. GR will make contact with the Forestry Commission and Balnagown Estates in order to invite them to be members, as well as being contributors to the cost of the helicopter count.

SC advised that an aerial count is likely to be required every 5 years with annual foot counts being carried out by estate staff.

9 Finance.

GR outlined the current financial state of the DMG, following the opening of the new Bank Account.

There are currently three invoices due for payment for work associated with the DMP, amounting to £10,347

It was suggested that £2,000 should be provisionally allocated for Administrative/Secretarial/Treasurer work throughout the year.

With the estimated cost of the helicopter count being £3,000, **the current total planned expenditure amounts to £15,347.**

GR will be claiming £3,300 from SNH as their grant contribution towards the production of the DMG.

Overall Financial position.

Once the grant of £3,300 is deducted, the current requirement for funds to 'balance the DMG's books amounts to **£12,347, say £12,500.**

The DMG currently has 5 members. If the FC and Balnagown join and bring the total to 7, **this will mean a contribution of £1,785 per member**

The Chairman and Secretary will liaise to communicate this situation to all members. **Action CB and GR**

10 Any other business.

MB asked for an update on the Ecology work required within the DMP.

Whilst ongoing monitoring is not compulsory, all agreed that the work should continue using estate staff. MB will advise on the best method for information exchange and recording.

DC undertook to circulate the Ecology Report completed by Nikki Dayton to all DMG members and to SC. **Action DC**

The provisional season cull figures are as follows. Subject to confirmation.

	<u>Mature Stags</u>	<u>Young Stags</u>	<u>Hinds</u>	<u>Calves</u>	<u>Sika Stags</u>
Dounie	8	2	20	7	
Gruinards	9		27	5	2
Gledfield	10		22	4	
Midfearn	22		62	9	
Strathrusdale	16		35		
Totals	<u>65</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>166</u>	<u>25</u>	<u>2</u>

Gruinards also shot 3 Roe Bucks and 3 Roe Does.

It was noted from the above figures that just over twice the number of hinds to stags had been shot which is similar to past years.

MB stated that the evidence on the ground was that stag numbers were slowly rising which will give the Group flexibility to increase the cull in future years.

KS initiated a discussion of the rates offered to clients for stalking. It was felt that the current average rate of £350 was low, but it was accepted that every Estate's charges varied. It was agreed to keep this matter under review and to try and obtain more information on what others are charging. GR is attending the Association of Deer Management Groups AGM in Kingussie on 19th February and will seek feedback, and update members on other current news.

11. Actions.

1. GR to submit claim to SNH by the end of February, for the work done on the completed Deer Management Plan.
2. GR to complete establishment of new ERDMG Website.
3. GR to place Deer Management Plan on the Website and inform local Press.
4. Consider the boundary of the DMG. All.
5. GR to contact the Forestry Commission and Balnagown Estates to ask them to join the ERDMG.
6. CB and GR to communicate financial obligations of the DMG to individual members.
7. DC to circulate Nikki Dayton's Ecology report to DMG members and to SC.