

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE EASTER ROSS DEER
MANAGEMENT GROUP, HELD ON FRIDAY 29th June 2018 AT 2.00 PM
AT MIDFEARN LODGE, ARDGAY.**

Present:

Mr Charlie Brooke	(Chairman)	Midfearn Estate
Mr Callum Beattie		Gledfield Estate
Mr Michael Brown		Midfearn Estate
Mr Jim Gilmour		Gruinards Estate
Mr Christopher Franklin		Gruinards Estate
Mr Robert Franklin		Gruinards Estate
Mr Alastair Harington	(Vice Chair)	Strathrusdale Estate
Mr Alex Hunter		Dounie Estate
Mr Dell Ross		Midfearn Estate
Mr Jamie Sawyer		Dounie Estate

In attendance:

Mr Sinclair Coghill (Scottish Natural Heritage)
Mrs Tamara Lawton (Scottish Natural Heritage)
Mr Victor Clements (Native Woods Cooperative (Scotland) Ltd)
Mr Paddy Meiklejohn (Blervie, Forres)
Mr Gordon Robertson (Secretary and Treasurer)

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Richard Harrington (Strathrusdale Estate), Neil Cameron (Gledfield), Alex Hunter (Dounie Estate) Derick Macaskill (Forestry Commission) Kim Sawyer (Dounie Estate) and Mr David Campbell (Land Consulting Services)

2. Chairman's introduction

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the Meeting. In particular Tamara Lawton from SNH and Victor Clements who had been appointed by ASDMG to carry out a Health Check on the Easter Ross DMP prior to the Government Review in April 2019.

3. Minutes of Meeting held on 06.04.2018

The Minutes of the meeting held on the 6th April 2018, previously circulated, were approved.

4. Action points from the previous Minutes.

- GR had been in contact with the Forestry Commission in Dingwall and will circulate their response. FC will advise on potential and existing sites for Native Woodland creation, expansion and management, as well as commercial timber opportunities. **Action GR**
- Peatland Restoration opportunities. The Peatland Restoration Programme was currently closed. The re-opening of the Programme is being considered in March 2019.

All other actions had been carried out or were to be covered later in the Agenda

5. Deer Count.

The Invoice for the Deer Count will be settled by SNH who will then send an invoice for 50% of the cost to the ERDMG. GR will apportion as agreed (per stags shot) and send out individual invoices to members. **Action GR**

The Group looked at the figures from the recent count. PM reminded everyone that the count had followed one of the worst winters for many years. The 'double cold snap' will have had a marked effect but the hind losses were not as severe as had been feared.

Calf losses were high with the proportion down to 20 calves per 100 hinds, as opposed to the expected 30 calves.

Stag losses were also high, with number short by 90 stags. Thinking forward to the approaching season, PM was happy to recommend a stag cull target of 85 stags. It is likely that there will be a shortage of mature stags.

CB reported that he had counted 44 dead hinds and calves in total, but that he had seen a good number of mature stags.

PM recommended that tenants and clients should be appraised of the effects of the winter so that there were no surprises. He also urged that the planned hind cull should be maintained.

VC commented that he was satisfied that the Group had a good grip on things and were exercising sensitive control. It appeared that mortalities could have been very much higher.

CB summarised by confirming that the Group would aim for cull targets similar to the previous year. All agreed with the caveat that there was an element of 'playing matters by ear' and we should adapt if the evidence demands it.

MB stated that it was clear that were 'in pockets', lying where there was warmth and where there was food

JG confirmed that his populations were nearly as per normal.

All present thanked SC and SNH for their help to complete the count.

6. Deer Management Plan. Working Plan Update

7. Deer Management Plan Assessment. Victor Clements.

VC reminded everyone that the progress with Deer Management Plan implementation is to be reviewed in April 2019. The ADMG had funded VC's health check of the ERDMG. All but one of the 45 DMG's were carrying out similar audits.

VC's brief is to highlight the Group's strong points and point out any weaknesses that required addressing.

The ERDMG should be shown higher up the previously circulated SNH league table.

The Group is small and self-contained, with not many designated sites and mainly fenced. The culls and counts showed a consistency. There was a connection with the Kyle of Sutherland Fisheries Trust.

Having carefully assessment the existing DMP he felt that he should be able to swiftly complete the review. He stressed the importance of the proposed Habitat Assessment work (see below)

By completing this work, the Group will put itself in a good position prior to next year's review.

MB asked if the increasing invasion of bracken might be down to Climate Change. TL said that she had not heard of this as a reason but acknowledged that the spread of bracken was a major concern.

The existing population model is a sound reference point and any new information should be referred back to established data

He would be looking at the percentage of woodland within the ERDMG area, the percentage of Native Woodland and the potential for increasing these areas.

Furthermore assessing non-native invasive species will be undertaken

RF reminded everyone that the Group were disappointed at the outcomes at the last appraisal. He was keen for VC to identify the areas that required improvement.

8. Habitat Assessment. SNH Grant. Update on progress

VC indicated that the £1,800 award from SNH should fund 6 days of specialist work. GR will contact Cathy Main (Consultant) as well as Nikki Dayton to push this important matter forward. **Action GR**

9. Scottish Natural Heritage

SC repeated the message of the importance of the second Government Assessment of DMG's in April 2019. He was pleased with the progress made by the ERDMG and offered support to the Group, and VC, to ensure that the improvements continued, and targets were met.

He advised the Group of the creation of the national Deer Working Group which will be working independently to assess, support and advise the ADMG and Government of the Deer Sector throughout Scotland.

SC indicated that TL would start to gradually replace him as the Groups representative. All supportive.

10. Deer Cull Reports

This matter had been discussed earlier on the Agenda. Basically- stick to last year's target, but be prepared to hold back if needs be.

11. Finance

GR will circulate

1. Invoices to individual members of the Group to cover their proportion of the 50% cost of the Helicopter count.

2. Invoices to individual members of the Group to cover the subscription to ADMG for the Group's membership. This is based on animals shot and will be clearly shown on the invoices with rates applied.
3. A suggested budget for consideration, building in current liabilities and future contingencies.
- 4.

12.AOCB

ADMG were carrying out their survey of the stalking rents to try and reappraise the true value of sporting stags. Questionnaire will be circulated widely.

13.Date of next Meeting.

The next meeting would take place in November. GR will circulate members to agree the date taking into account the meeting dates of the Kyle of Sutherland Fisheries Trust.

Action GR

The Meeting closed at 4.00 pm.

ACTIONS

1. Circulate members with Forestry Commission feedback on potential woodland sites within ERDMG **Action GR**
2. Agree November date for next meeting. **Action GR**
3. Contact Cathy Main and Nikki Dayton to push for the Habitat Assessment work to commence. **Action GR**
4. Apportion the cost of 50% of the charge for the helicopter count to members of the ERDMG **Action GR**
5. Send out invoices for ADMG subs, and suggested budget for contingencies and existing liabilities. **Action. GR**