

Upper Deeside and Donside Deer Management Group

Meeting of Thursday 25th April 2019

Invercauld Keiloch

Attendees

Angus McNicol - Invercauld (Chairman)
Tom Willis (Secretary)
Dr Linzi Seivwright Caorann (Consultant)
Capt Mark Nicolson - Mar Estate
David Frew - Mar Lodge
Chris Murphy - Mar Lodge
Neil Christie - Allargue
Will Reid - Invercauld
Andrew Salvesen - Dinnet Moor
Arthur Fernie Mar Estate
Iain Hope - SNH
Mike Cottam - CNPA
Stuart Jennings - RSPB
Richard Greenlaw Glenavon
Richard Thomas Invercauld
Kevin Peters – Forestry and Land Scotland

Apologies

Robin Leslie Melville - Candacraig
Rory Galloway - Savills
Merlin Becker GWCT Auchnerran
Adrian Walker – Allargue
Edward Humphrey - Dinnet Estate
Richard Gledson - Delnadamp
Clive Meikle - Glenavon

1. Apologies

As above.

2. Minutes of previous meeting

Minutes of meeting of 16th November 2018 approved and agreed to go onto the website **(Secretary)**.

3. Actions arising from the Minutes of the previous meeting

Members to submit a return to the Annual Report for year ending 31/03/18 now complete **(Members)**.

84% of the Group area now covered by HIA.

Dinnet Moor plan to do HIA in 2019 **(Dinnet Moor)**.

Mark Nicolson (Mar Estate) agreed to pick up his action point of a press release after liaison with the Chairman and Secretary (**MMN, Secretary and Chairman**).

Deer welfare – stag weights now collected from all key Estates and inserted into the updated Working Plan.

Ongoing action point to produce a map of the DMG area containing a map of opened woodlands for deer shelter. Secretary to liaise with Members and Consultants to produce this (**All**).

4. DMG Assessment

Additional evidence had been provided by the Office Bearers and consultant to Iain Hope (SNH) to aid in carrying out an up to date assessment of the Group's performance which comprise the Minutes of the last 3 years of meetings, the Habitat Impact Assessment Report, the Annual Reports since 2015 (when they commenced), the ADMG Health Check and the updated Working Plan. A meeting was held on 25th April at 2pm between Iain Hope, the Chairman, Secretary and DMG Consultant where any additional evidence requirements were discussed. SNH await the evidence and will then re-do the assessment to reflect this additional information when submitted.

The Group has a majority of 'green' scores and is confident that this position can be improved with the presentation of additional evidence.

It is the expectation of the Scottish Government that all groups should deliver 'green' scores as per the assessment criteria as far as possible.

If the Group wish to appeal the revised assessment, there is a procedure in place that the Secretary and Chairman will instigate once the revised assessment is received.

Secretary to approach Dinnet Estate to gather evidence of mitigation measures regarding the deer that are present on their agricultural land.

SNH intend to produce their report to Scottish Government on the outcome of the assessment process in autumn 2019.

5. Working plan

Count information from the recent black ground spring foot count and partial helicopter count is now updated and included within the plan.

It is notable that the lowest number of hinds are present within the group since 1996 with stags also starting to decline, which is evidence the Group's policies on culling are working effectively.

The Group considered the figures for the number of hinds who were pregnant after the 2018/19 winter, stalkers believed that pregnancies had been low after the winter.

The Group may also seek to carry out a summer sample calving count which the Secretary will organise with Members at the appropriate time (**Secretary**).

All stalkers are to submit any updated mortality figures for the 2018/19 winter to the Secretary (**Stalkers**).

Mar Lodge didn't set a target stag cull in line with their usual policy but noted the Quoich was a lot quieter with less stags culled. Mar Lodge aim for 80-100 sporting stags.

It was noted that there had possibly been less cross boundary movement potentially influenced by the large culls taking place in West Grampian DMG and Cairngorms/Speyside DMG although the situation is still dynamic.

The Group will monitor whether deer are emigrating in a few years time due to these external effects.

Allargue and Corndavon wish to harvest 14 sporting stags per year with Corndavon maintaining the existing deer fence.

Forest Land Scotland reported no material change planned regarding felling and will notify the Group if this changes.

No issues reported by West Grampian DMG or Cairngorms/Speyside DMG following liaison between the Secretary and those groups.

Dialogue suggested with Cairngorms Connect.

Mar Lodge have carried out a comprehensive survey of montane scrub and produced maps of what they manage.

6. Population model

It is notable that the culls from the previous season have overachieved from what was set out in the population model within the plan in the last season. The Group is getting closer to its target population.

The roe deer cull is up although it may be to additional reporting (FLS and RSPB) although stalkers did report additional roe culled.

A breakdown of the population model for individual estates is available.

The Group is predicting a slightly higher stag cull and slightly lower hind cull next season.

Comparison of foot counts and the population model bears out and shows reasonable correlation, providing a check on what is on the ground.

Stalkers are broadly happy with the numbers of stags available on the ground.

7. Habitat Impact Assessment

84% of the Group area now covered by HIA.

Group has elected to carry out the next round of HIA in 2021 to bring the Group onto the same cycle as Mar Lodge.

Mar Lodge agreed to seek to participate in the same methodology (SNH Best Practice Guidance) for a limited number of samples in addition to their current programme (470 plots) to enable consistent results and will discuss with their in-house ecologists.

It was noted that many Members had evidence of hare damage in the majority of their sample plots.

Allargue have undertaken hare sample testing with dedicated plots to monitor the ongoing hare impacts they have been experiencing following an unfavourable SSSI report.

8. Budget and 2018/19 Accounts

Secretary to update the accounts following the Chairman's review of the apportionment and circulate to Members via email along with the contribution invoices for the year **(Secretary)**.

Chairman and Secretary to complete Barclays Bank opening for Group **(Chairman and Secretary)**.

Cost apportionment to be reviewed and altered to reflect the current membership of the Group **(Chairman and Secretary)**.

9. Public meeting

Public meeting to be held later on 25th April at 6pm, Braemar Village Hall comprising presentations from the Chairman, Consultant and Secretary on activities in the past 12 months.

10. AOCB

32 out of 34 stalkers have DSC1 with a significant majority also qualified to DSC 2 level.

Members expressed interest in lobbying the CNPA to follow up on the impacts of the number of visitors in the National Park, which will be progressed by the Secretary.

ADMG collating information on the cost of managing deer which the Secretary will circulate once received in due course.