

Minutes of Upper Deeside and Donside Land Management Group

Invercauld Meeting Room and by zoom on 25 April 2025 at 2.20pm.

<p>Present (in person) Angus McNicol (Chair & Invercauld) Dr Linzi Seivwright (Secretary) David Frew (Mar Lodge) Chris Murphy (Mar Lodge) Richard Cooke (ADMG)</p>	<p>Present (by Zoom) Capt Mark Nicolson (Mar Estate) Ben Carter (Invercauld Home Beat) Andrew Salvesen (DWT) Will Reid (Invercauld Baddoch) Hal Salvesen (Tullich) Mike Cottam (CNPA) Colin Maclean (CNPA)</p>	<p>Apologies Kevin Peters (FLS) Andrew Young (Glen Avon) Arthur Fernie (Mar Estate) Edward Humphrey (Dinnet Estate) Iain Hope (NatureScot)</p>
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Item		Action
1.	Welcome and Apologies	
	Mr McNicol (Chairman) welcomed everyone to the meeting.	
2.	Minutes of the previous Meeting	
	The minutes of the last meeting, on 14 th November 2024, were proposed for approval by David Frew and seconded by Chris Murphy. The minutes were therefore adopted without alteration.	
3.	Matters Arising from Meeting held on 14th November 2024	
	<p>Mr McNicol ran through the action points in the meeting and the following were noted:-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> National Park contact - Mr McNicol confirmed he had been in touch with the CNPA who had explained that they were committed to being present at UDD LMG meetings. Dr Seivwright confirmed that she had not had any information from Nature Scot with regards to properties adjacent to the LMG. No details had been obtained for a Glen Livet contact. David Frew had a contact and he would see if he could identify who this currently is. Venison Subsidy Scheme - Mr McNicol explained he had not undertaken a PR response to this scheme. It was agreed that Mr McNicol would however write to the CNPA to confirm that no UDD LMG members had taken part in it and it was considered unfair that those who had previously undertaken large culls and were maintaining a healthy and sustainable population of red deer had not been able to benefit from the scheme. Dr Seivwright confirmed she had completed the 2024 annual report and this has been put on the website. Habitat Impact Assessments – Various members had undertaken HIA in 2024 and a number were due to undertake HIA in 2025. This included Mar Lodge who were due to undertake a full scale HIA this year. 	<p>DF</p> <p>ASM</p>

	<p>7. Dr Seivwright had circulated the ADMG autumn bulletin.</p> <p>8. Richard Cooke confirmed that he had not been put in contact with Mr Alistair Storey by Richard Gledson. Mr McNicol agreed that he would seek to make this contact.</p> <p>9. Deer counts - There had been a partial deer count in the group area this spring.</p> <p>10. Press release - Mr McNicol explained that a press release had been circulated earlier in the year on the subject of the UDD LMG joining the Common Ground Forum which had had good social media coverage and was printed on the front page of the Braemar Buzzard magazine. Other PR would be considered later in the agenda.</p> <p>11. Mr McNicol explained that after the meeting he had agreed with Dr Seivwright the secretariat role. It was agreed that there was no additional secretariat support needed at the present time.</p>	<p>ASM</p>
4.	Working Plan including Culls, Counts and Deer Movements	
	<p>Mr McNicol drew the meeting's attention to Paper 4 which had been circulated prior to the meeting. This comprised a summary of what members had undertaken against key actions set out in the current Deer Management Plan. Mr McNicol said he felt this was a very useful document and it was agreed that this would be updated for future meetings. In particular, Mr McNicol requested that Dr Seivwright highlights at the November 2025 meeting specifically where some items had either not been undertaken or not fully undertaken so that a greater focus could be put on these.</p> <p>It was also agreed that Dr Seivwright would collate data from members on peatland restoration, natural woodland regeneration and the distance of paths and tracks commonly used by the public.</p> <p>There was a brief discussion on the use of non lead ammunition. Richard Cooke explained that there appeared to be a move towards non lead ammunition being compulsory. Enabling those stalkers who are sceptical about non lead ammunition to learn from the experience of others they know and trust, particularly with more recently developed ammunition, would be beneficial. It was agreed Mr McNicol would speak with Gary Coutts at Balmoral to see if this could be facilitated at the annual rifle shoot in June.</p>	<p>LS</p> <p>LS</p> <p>ASM</p>
5.	Habitat Impact Assessments	
	<p>As discussed earlier, Mar Lodge are intending to undertake a major HIA assessment in 2025. Some other members are also undertaking HIA in 2025. All those undertaking HIA are asked to pass their results on to Dr Seivwright so that she can update her GIS model of impacts.</p>	<p>ALL</p>
6.	Venison and ADMG Update	
	<p>Dr Seivwright had circulated the ADMG's 2025 update prior to the meeting.</p> <p>Dr Seivwright summarised the key elements of the Natural Environment Bill which is in four key parts, one of which is deer. She explained that although DMRO's had been dropped, there was a proposal in the Bill for something similar whereby Nature Scot could trigger action if under sections 7 or 8 if a Minister deemed this necessary to meet a public sector target. There is concern within ADMG that this could disincentivise collaborative deer management. The draft would also provide more</p>	

	<p>powers to Nature Scot whilst a proposed code of practice is also an important element of the proposals.</p> <p>Dr Seivwright explained that the current consultation on the Bill is due to end on 9th May 2025 and all members are encouraged to make their own responses to this.</p> <p>Dr Seivwright explained that various organisations including ADMG and Scottish Environment Link had recently written to the Holyrood Committee considering the Bill outlining concerns that all organisations shared. It was agreed that Dr Seivwright would see if this letter could be circulated to UDD LMG members in order, if so, Mr McNicol would prepare a short submission of support of this letter and circulate this around the UDD LMG membership for their consideration, prior to its submission to Nature Scot.</p>	LS
7.	NatureScot & CNPA Updates	
	<p>There was no representative available to provide an update from Nature Scot.</p> <p>Colin Maclean and Mike Cottam provided an update of activities by the CNPA.</p> <p>Mr Maclean summarised the pilot venison subsidy scheme. There had been 12 estates qualifying for a total subsidy of £28,000 under this scheme. It is proposed that there will be another pilot scheme next season.</p> <p>Mr Maclean explained that a consultation had now closed on the draft Integrated Fire Management Plan. It is expected that the draft plan, with or without amendments, would go to the CNPA board in June 2025 for consideration. The two items that were consistent through the consultation responses that had been received were the management of fuel loads and muirburn.</p> <p>Mr Cottam explained that two deer larders had been installed to the south of the National Park, one approximately at either end of Strathardle. These were operated by the farmer at each site with a proportion of the resulting product going to schools for educational purposes or food banks. There is a discussion currently over the installation of a similar larder at the east end of the National Park. Mark Nicolson expressed his support for this initiative. It was also agreed that a facility to the east of the UDD LMG area could be very useful given there had been significant discussion recently about the rising number of deer in that general area.</p>	
8.	Proposed Budget & Subscription 2025/26	
	<p>Mr McNicol drew the meeting's attention to the budget and proposed subscription split that had been prepared by Dr Seivwright and circulated prior to the meeting.</p> <p>Dr Seivwright explained that there were three main sources of costs being the ADMG subscriptions, administration for small matters such as the annual website fee and the secretariat.</p> <p>It was agreed that some unrecoverable VAT that Dr Seivwright had incurred in the previous year would be refunded to her and this would be included in the 2025/26 budget.</p> <p>With regards to subscriptions, Mr Frew expressed his concern at the method used for calculating the subscriptions to ADMG. This was a significant portion of costs and the formula disadvantaged those culling the greatest number of deer. Mr Cooke</p>	

	<p>suggested that the formula for calculation of ADMG subs was intended to balance the cost against income and those culling a greater number of deer generally had a higher income from this.</p> <p>It was agreed that there was no ideal solution to the calculation of subscriptions. However the proposed methodology in Dr Seivwright's paper would be taken forward once the budget had been amended as above and Dr Seivwright would circulate this after the meeting along with relevant subscription invoices to each member.</p>	LS
9.	Communications	
9.1	<p>Draft Annual Report 2025</p> <p>Dr Seivwright drew the meeting's attention to the draft annual report she had circulated prior to the meeting. Mr McNicol thanked everyone for contributing to this. There were no adjustments to the draft proposed but Dr Seivwright would email members asking them to make any comments by Friday 9th May 2025 at which point she would then finalise the Report and publish it on the Group's website.</p>	ALL/LS
9.2	<p>Press Release</p> <p>It had previously been agreed that the group would target two relevant press releases each year with a view to explaining to the wider public what the group and its members do. The next three topics for consideration were peatland restoration, natural regeneration of woodland and provision of access infrastructure. As had been agreed earlier in the meeting, Dr Seivwright would seek to collate data from members on these three topics.</p>	LS
9.3	<p>Consultation Responses</p> <p>Mr McNicol explained that for the last consultation response submitted on behalf of the group was in respect of the CNPA's draft fire bylaw. Mr Maclean explained that the draft bylaw had now gone to the Scottish Ministers and their response on this is awaited.</p> <p>Other consultations that are currently ongoing are in respect of the draft new Muirburn Code and the Natural Environment Bill. Other than had been discussed with regards to the Natural Environment Bill, it was agreed that there would be no response made to the draft Muirburn Code.</p>	
10.	AOCB	
10.1	<p>Mr Nicolson asked that ADMG consider how WES accreditation could better be used to advantage its members in respect of deer management. Mr Cooke to feed this back to ADMG.</p>	RC
10.2	<p>Mr Murphy explained that the South Deeside North Angus DMG had a formula for undertaking deer counts whereby these would happen on the first Monday after the end of the hind season. If that day was unsuitable due to weather, the subsequent Monday would be the count day and so on until a suitable count day was identified. It was agreed that this formula would be applied within the UDD LMG area as well going forwards so that as far as practicable the various local groups were counting on the same day.</p> <p>There being no further business the meeting then concluded.</p>	ALL

