

# MULL DEER MANAGEMENT GROUP

Minutes of a Meeting of the Mull Deer Management Group held at Salen Hotel on Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> October, 2023 at 12:30pm.

<b>Present</b>	Tiffany Laing (TL)	Rossal	Chairman
	James Corbett (JC)	Lochbuie	Vice Chairman
	Andrew Holman (AH)	Kilfinichen	Secretary
	Richard de Klee	Auchnacraig	
	Donald Bisset	Benmore	
	Anthony Dodd	Lochbuie	
	Graeme Sinclair	Pennyghael	
	Mark Horton	Carsaig	
	Sam Hird	Carsaig	
	James Harmer	Gruline	
	Jan Dunlop	Ranger Service	
	Angharad Burney	NTS	
	Emily Wilkins	Ranger Service / NTS	
	Shaun Braid	Glengorm / Oskamull	
	Daniel Braid	Quinish	
	Steve Irvine	Ardnacross	
	John Maughan	Mull Community Council	
	Nathan Berrie	NatureScot	
	John Jackson	FLS	
	Charlotte de Klee	Auchnacraig	
Rupert de Klee	Auchnacraig		
John Johnson	Scoor / Beach / Argyll Estates		
Hugh Nicol	Argyll Estates		
Jasper Heusden	Ormsaig		
Chris James	Aird Darraich		

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| <b>1. Apologies</b> | Biil Bewsher<br>Tom Corbett<br>David Johnson<br>James Greig<br>Nicola Harmer | <b>Action By</b> |
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The Chairman welcomed John Maughan and Nathan Berrie to their first MDMG meeting and thanked them for attending.

## 2. Minutes of the Last Meeting

The Minutes of the meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> February were accepted as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### a. Matters Arising

Jan Dunlop explained that there had been no movement since the previous meeting in relation to the Peatland Officer.

The Vice Chairman advised the meeting that the SQWV invoicing had finally been resolved but that the cost (for the MDMG group) had increased from £500 to £2,500. The SQWV bill would be sent to MDMG who will divide it and invoice relevant members in proportion to their annual cull. **AH**

In conjunction with the above Jonathan Whitehead was due to inspect the relevant larders between 24-25<sup>th</sup> October.

Mark Horton asked to be included in the SQWV going forward as Carsaig has a new larder. **AH**

There were no other matters arising that would not be covered in the meeting's agenda.

### **3. Annual Accounts**

The annual accounts were circulated. It was noted that the new van will require income.

### **4. Game Dealer**

- a. As the members were aware, the old van had broken down at the start of the season and was deemed beyond economic repair. TL had managed to source a good second-hand replacement from Inverness with 105,000 miles on the clock, for £9,500. There had not been sufficient funds in the account to pay for the replacement van so TL had part-funded it. The meeting acknowledged that whilst the lack of a van had caused considerable inconvenience the members nevertheless expressed their thanks to TL for resolving the situation so speedily.

A discussion ensued and it was agreed to pay Tommy Paterson a levy of £4.00 per beast loaded into the larder while the van was off the road and the members expressed their thanks to him for continuing to provide the service. **AH**

- b. The chiller had been inspected and serviced by KS Refrigeration before the start of the season and was functioning satisfactorily.
- c. The prices from Highland Game were circulated and discussed.
- d. A number of members commented, given the disappointing prices, on whether to invite tenders from other game dealers now that MDMG own the chiller – albeit operating on the same basis with a central collection from the chiller. Following a number of comments from the members it was agreed to remain with Highland Game for this season.

It was noted that damaged carcasses should only see a reduction in value rather than the entire carcass being condemned.

### **5. ADMG**

There was no report due to Bill Bewsher being unable to attend.

The Chairman urged members to subscribe to the on-line publication e-Scope and, in particular, the 'Common Ground Forum'.

## **6. Counts & Culls**

- a. Stag cull figures to date were reported
- b. Remaining stag and planned hind culls were reported
- c. Graeme Sinclair reported recruitment of 30-35% at Pennyghael, with healthy, strong calves and some big stags. This was acknowledged by Glenforsa, Kilfinichen and Rossal and felt likely due to the dry spell in May-June.

A discussion took place around the Scottish Government's proposed population density target of 10 deer per km<sup>2</sup>, and in particular the land area over which the density should be calculated. It was noted that the last SNH count for the MDMG area showed a density of 7 deer per km<sup>2</sup>. Graeme Sinclair noted that Pennyghael had carried out an audit and estimated 10.1 per km<sup>2</sup>.

Nathan Berrie explained that Mull was not scheduled to have a NatureScot helicopter count again at any time in the foreseeable future and that the best way to be able to demonstrate carrying capacity was for all land managers to undertake regular Habitat Impact Assessments on their holdings. It would also be helpful to renew the island-wide Deer Management Plan.

John Maughan asked if more could be done to limit damage from marauding deer on the Ross where deer fencing appeared to be channelling deer into certain areas. Argyll Estates confirmed that while a lot more deer had been culled over the last 10 years; that their numbers had increased with the increase in forestry blocks but that stalkers will continue to work and liaise with crofters. It was acknowledged that in recent memory there were no deer west of Ormsaig.

- d. TL asked the meeting if the group was happy to publish total culls on the website; which was unanimously agreed.
- e. Last winter's mortality was discussed and it was felt that there were no alarming signs and that it had been an average winter.

## **7. Sheep numbers**

The meeting discussed livestock numbers and it was felt that numbers were generally static and stable.

Sea Eagles continued to predate livestock and were occasionally seen swooping at deer above cliffs but that, unlike with sheep, their impact on the deer population was not felt to be material.

## **8. Forestry Development**

There was no fencing imminent on any landholding albeit Pennyghael were planning to fence an additional 2,000 acres in 2024/25.

## 9. Deer Management Issues

- a. Nathan Barrie gave an overview of his role and expressed his thanks that MDMG seems to be working well as a deer management group. Whilst he will be tasked to deliver the Scottish Govt. objectives of  $\leq 10$  deer per km<sup>2</sup>, Mull is not currently seen as a priority area by NatureScot.

Nathan explained that he is based in Fort William and email is the best method of contacting him - albeit he expects to be liaising with DMG's rather than individual landholders. His email address is: nathan.berrie@nature.scot

In answer to a question from the members on the area over which the deer density should be calculated he explained that there was likely to be a site-specific approach taken on this.

- b. Graeme Sinclair informed the meeting that he is qualified to witness candidates' DMQ2 examination, so these can be completed on the island. The cost is circa £120 per person and anyone considering the qualification was encouraged to contact Graeme directly.
- c. Donald Bisset explained that Ben More had experienced a material amount of disturbance from walkers this year and asked if Jan Dunlop's stalking leaflet could go up on the ferry. In response Jan explained that she was hoping to get a QR code for the leaflet in the next reprint and that due to the ferries being redeployed on other routes it would be best to wait until the situation had improved.
- d. It was noted that David Laing and Jamie Freeman would be joining the group.

ALL

## 10. Ranger Update

Jan Dunlop briefed the meeting on the summer's activity and explained that the seasonal ranger from May-September had worked well. Their main duty had been to prevent wildlife disturbance and next year it was hoped they would be able to stay in post until the rally.

Angharad Burney was introduced and welcomed as the new NTS property manager for the island and Treshnish.

## 11. Community involvement

- a. The marauding deer item had been discussed earlier in the meeting
- b. John Maughan was welcomed as the Community Council representative

## 12. Any other business

- a. Forthcoming abolition of the Closed Season for stags

The proposed legislation was discussed and it was generally felt that removing the closed season for stags was unlikely to make any material difference to population numbers. It was noted that no MDMG members were looking to change their current cull programmes.

b. Copper Bullets

Only Lochbuie and Pennyghael were using copper bullets and a widespread discussion ensued amongst all the members about the efficacy of copper bullets. Both estates said that with identical bullet placement beasts shot with copper behaved very differently to those shot with lead and that they were reviewing their results.

c. Scottish Venison Summit

A Scottish Venison Summit was being held on 20<sup>th</sup> November. TL explained that he would attend and that any other members wanting to go should register via ADMG.

d. FLS

John Jackson explained that there was likely to be a reorganisation within FLS in the next couple of years although he did not expect this to impact the ground lease for the chiller.

**13. Date of the next Meeting**

The next meeting will take place at 12:30pm on Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> February, 2024 at Salen Hotel.

Chairman.....