**Minutes of Lochalsh Deer Management Group on Thursday 9th June 2017 at Attadale**

1) **Present**:

Ewen Macpherson, Attadale

Richard Cooke, Chair ADMG

Andrew Slaughter, Inverinate

Gordon Macpherson, Arineckaig

Donald MacKenzie, Arineckaig

Susan Jones, Attadale

Thomas Watson, Attadale

Soeren Hoejlund, Attadale

Alec Cormack, Attadale

Joanna Macpherson, Attadale

Chris MacKenzie, Achnashellach

Russell Cooper, FES

Sinclair Coghill, SNH

In attendance:

David Sproule, Achintee Crofters

Kate Stephens, Councillor

2) Minutes of meeting on 7th December 2016 were approved

3) **Chairman’s Report**

EAM welcomed Richard Cooke to the meeting and invited him to update everyone on the current situation.

RCooke summarised progress. The sporting rate questionnaires had been sent out but in 1994 there were 8000 properties included, while now there are estimated to be 55,000 properties due to receive the forms.

He described the review of the SNH report before the new committee headed by Roseanna Cunningham, the Cabinet Secretary.

He mentioned the ADMG economic report showing deer stalking was worth £141 million, employed 2,520 full-time employees as well as the downstream impact on other businesses accommodation, gunsmiths, etc while SNH estimated £36 million by excluding the additional business downstream.

Emphasised deer management is a complex business with differences between Highland & Lowland – it is about grazing impacts and not numbers

Two conclusions by the committee that appeared to be against the voluntary principle were deer are the property of the people and SNH should set the deer cull numbers.

Currently Roseanna Cunningham is minded for SNH to make use of their current powers and likely to have a task group and environmental group to build a consensus with an independent chair.

Future will be for all deer groups to have plans online and to review them frequently and they should include a population plan, an action plan and always acknowledge the public interest. Currently out of 42 groups, 37 have them online.

RC emphasised the urgent need to develop Habitat Impact Assessments across the open deer range and commended the group for already being well ahead with this.

In 2019 another review is planned to assess progress – important to keep evidence and track progress

EAM thanked RC for his interesting update.

AGM commented that SNH should be better funded so they could maintain their very useful training for best practice.

4) **Update to the deer management plan**

Susan Jones had invited results from individual estates and had asked if there had been any significant changes in any area.

Russell explained FES using deer larder at Achmore.

Discussion followed about the necessary frequency for habitat surveys to be carried out. Opinions differed and a compromise was agreed that estates should survey for 3 consecutive years, followed by a two year gap while Inverinate and Attadale planned to do five years to ensure robust data.

SJ pointed out red spots on the current Deer plan included:

Tree planning – where there are forestry plans these should be included

Peatland restoration plans – SC pointed out funding available from SNH.

Since meeting SC sent the following information: <http://www.snh.gov.uk/climate-change/taking-action/carbon-management/peatland-action/information-for-applicants/>

Use this email address to ask for help: PeatlandAction@snh.gov.uk

SC emphasised the need for hard targets to be aimed at rather than being vague and leaving them empty.

He explained that research has shown that where more than a third of heather shoots are browsed per year, this is likely to result in a reduction in heather condition and thereby cover over time. Deer are heavily reliant on heather for bulk fodder through the winter when grasses are much less available. A reduction in heather cover is likely to result in lower winter survival.

Ticks – discussion followed on how numbers could be estimated. Kate S mentioned that as a health researcher at UHI she knew there were hot spots for Lymes Disease and these should be tracked.

AGM requested that the %age of hinds with calves that survived the winter was important information and should be recorded. It is already recorded by the stalkers. The vital question is how many hinds have male or female calves as the former consume more from their mothers.

5) **Hind Culls**

 Attadale 75 hinds, 49 calves

Achnashellach 32 hinds, 14 calves

Arineckaig 6 hinds 6 calves (2male 4 female)

Inverinate 325 hinds, 141 calves

6) **Treasurer’s Report**

 AGM will go through with AC so he is clear about the current situation. Some confusion on the amounts paid by the FES as only the Achnashellach part is a member of the LDMG.

Membership fees are paid according to a 5 year average of the respective deer cull on each estate.

EAM explained there is no bank account so everyone must pay when requested and pointed out SJ must be paid for her additional work on the deer management plan.

7) **AOB**

RC updated all about current situation at FES, from 1st April 2019 it will be called Forest & Land Scotland and Fergus Ewing’s main interest is in commercial forestry. It will remain the Forestry Commission in England & Wales.

SC said deer debate in parliament would be held in June.

JMM to check membership fees are uptodate – have invoices been raised?

RC said Strome deer fence is to be renewed.

It was agreed the next meeting would be held after the end of the stag stalking in last week of October 2017, exact date to be confirmed