

# Lochalsh Deer Management Group Deer Management Plan 2016-2020



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## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Background to Plan**

In 2013, the Scottish Government Rural Affairs Climate Change and Environment Committee (RACCE) undertook a review of Deer Management in Scotland. One of the recommendations of the Committee was that the deer sector should show that the voluntary basis of deer management should be 'fit for purpose' and it was recommended that this should be done by the end of 2016.

Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), in partnership with numerous other rural organisations, had previously published a 'Code of Practice on Deer Management' which had come into effect on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2012. The Code is the foundation document for sustainable deer management in Scotland.

In 2014, a Deer Management Group (DMG) Benchmark was designed and published by SNH and the Association of Deer Management Groups (ADMG) to help provide guidance to DMG's on how to assess and demonstrate its effectiveness in relation to the previously produced 'Code of Practice on Deer Management'.

As part of the benchmark criteria, it was considered by the ADMG and SNH that 'Effective Deer Management Plans' for each Deer Management Group would be the best way to demonstrate this 'fit for purpose' recommendation outlined by RACCE and that those plans would be living plans that could evolve as management objectives changed over time.

This new plan, which has been prepared at the DMG level, will address all the actions listed in the new 'DMG benchmark'. The plan will also incorporate information from previously prepared individual Estate Plans and the group plan previously prepared by Professor RJ Putman in 2007.

### **1.2 Members of Group**

The Lochalsh Deer Management Group consists of four private Estates and an area of land held by the Forestry Commission (refer to Appendix 1 for location map). The private Estates are Achnashellach (South Beat only as the land on the north side of the A890 is part of the South West Ross DMG); Arineckaig, Attadale and Inverinate (Inverinate itself has three distinct beats known as Killilan, Inverinate and West Benula). The Forestry Commission has an area of land situated centrally within Glen Carron and is bounded in part by the south beat of Achnashellach Estate.

All five members return cull data annually to SNH.

### **1.3 Lochalsh DMG Objectives**

The Lochalsh group's two key objectives are:

- To maintain a sustainable stock of healthy deer which will meet the management aims and objectives of all the group landowners and the aims and objectives of the SNH 'Code of Practice on Deer Management';
- To adhere to the ADMG's Principles of Collaboration.

**The ADMG's Principles of Collaboration are:**

*We:*

- *Acknowledge what we have in common – a shared commitment to a sustainable and economically viable Scottish countryside.*
- *Make a commitment to work together to achieve and maintain that.*
- *Accept that we have a diversity of management objectives and respect each other's objectives.*
- *Undertake to communicate openly with all relevant parties.*
- *Commit to negotiate and, where necessary, to compromise in order to accommodate the reasonable land management requirements of neighbours.*
- *Where there are areas of disagreement we undertake to work together to resolve them*

## **1.4 Individual Land Holding Details**

### **Arineckaig Estate**

Arineckaig Estate is approximately 2000ha in size and is managed by Mr and Mrs AG Macpherson. The Estate is located against the NW corner of Attadale Estate and marches on its North and East boundaries with Achnashellach. A map showing Estate details can be found in Appendix 2.

The majority of the Estate is hill country and rises to a height of 675m. Apart from some in-bye croft land all of it is open to deer except for an area of 250ha located in the south western corner which was deer fenced in 2000/01 under a Crofter Forestry Scheme and today remains unavailable to deer. A further 120ha of blanket bog has been impacted by extensive historic peat cutting.

Area Name	size	comments
Crofter Forestry Scheme	250ha	Planted area of mixed broadleaves. Fenced in 2000/01.

### **Achnashellach Estate**

Achnashellach Estate is approximately 6000ha in size with 4000ha found on the south side of the A890 (South Beat) within this group area. The Estate is owned and managed by Major Nicholas Wills. It marches with Arineckaig on its south western boundary and the north east boundary marches with Glencarron Estate. There is a large central section of forestry owned by the Forestry Commission. A map showing Estate details can be found in Appendix 2.

The majority of the Estate is hill country however there is significant areas of native woodland along the southern shores of Loch Dughail and on the North West slopes of Creag an Eilein.

Two areas of land have been made unavailable for deer. These are:

Area Name	size	comments
Woodland Grant Scheme Loch Dughail	43.2ha	Natural Regeneration of mixed broadleaves. Fenced in 1994.
Woodland Grant Scheme Coire Dubh	9.2ha	Natural Regeneration of mixed broadleaves. Fenced in 1994.

### **Attadale Estate**

Attadale Estate is owned by the Attadale Trust and leased to Mr EA Macpherson. It has an area of approximately 13,571ha and extends from sea level on the east side of Loch Carron to over 900m at its eastern boundary towards Loch Monar. It bounds with Achnashellach and Arineckaig to the north and bounds with Forestry Commission-South Strome, Nonach and Killian in the south. An electric fence runs from Nonach to the edge of the Forestry Commission block and a deer fence bounds the forestry land all the way to Loch Carron. A map showing Estate details can be found in Appendix 2.

The majority of the Estate is hill country with areas of remnant Scots Pine and mixed native broadleaf in the lower valleys and river gullies. 13,035ha is open to deer and 536ha is unavailable to deer. The unavailable land consists of:

Area Name	size	comments
Maman Plantation	46ha	Previously pine plantation, cleared, deer fenced and replanted with natives.
Avalanche Shelter	6ha	Planted with Mixed broadleaves
Woodland Grant Scheme Various sites in Attadale glen	108ha in 11 enclosures	Natural Regeneration. Fenced in 1995. Contains a selection of native broadleaves and Scots Pine.
Woodland Grant Scheme Attadale Glen	6ha in 1 enclosure	Natural Regeneration. Contains a selection of native broadleaves and Scots Pine.
Big House, Strathan, Home farm, west of railway, shore, Achintee, Keeper's Cottage WGS	370ha	Home farm land etc
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>536HA</b>	

Two lodge pole pine plantations of approximately 478ha (which were planted in the late 1960's and are of low value) are part of the available land and have been open to deer for over 30 years. Over the past 20 years in particular, stretches of the remaining original fence have gradually been removed.

**Inverinate Estate**

Inverinate Estate is approximately 25546ha and is owned and managed by SMECH Management Ltd. For management purposes (and based on old Estate boundaries) the Estate is divided into three main beats- Killilan, Inverinate and West Benula. The Estate marches with Attadale along its northern boundary and extends south through to Kintail and east towards Glen Affric. A map showing Estate details can be found in Appendix 2.

The majority of the Estate is hill country and is open to deer; however 3329ha is unavailable to deer.

The unavailable land consists of:

Area Name	size	comments
Crofters Common Grazing (Carr Brae to Glenn Elchaig)	2800ha	Used for sheep, cattle etc by resident crofters
Former Forestry Commission Plantations	Inverinate 220ha Dorusduain 223ha	Deer fenced. Planted with conifers.
Woodland Restoration Scheme Carr Brae	54ha	Fenced in 1998. Planted with a mix of native broadleaves.
Woodland Restoration Scheme Glenn Ling	16ha in 5 enclosures	Fenced in 1998. Planted with a mix of native broadleaves and Pines.
Woodland Restoration Scheme Glenn Elchaig and Strath Duilleach to Iron Lodge	16ha in 15 enclosures	Fenced in 1998. Planted with a mix of native broadleaves and Pines.
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3329ha</b>	

**Forestry Commission-Achnashellach**

The Forestry Commission land at Achnashellach lies within Glen Carron in Wester Ross and covers a total area of approximately 1535Ha. The forest is split north and south by the River Carron, the A890 and the Inverness to Kyle railway which runs along the valley floor. Only the land south of the A890 is part of the Lochalsh DMG and that is approximately 800Ha in size.

The Forest was the fourth acquisition made by the Forestry Commission in 1921 and the area has a long history of forest management and woodland cover. As well as commercial forest there are notable remnants of native pinewood scattered across the southern area totalling an area of approximately 57ha. The forest contains its own population of Red, Sika and Roe deer which are actively managed. A map of the forest area can be found in Appendix 2.



## 1.5 Timescale of Plan

The period of this plan is 2016-2020. It shall be fully reviewed in 2020 and any amendments to cull numbers, changes to habitat management etc will be noted.

Annual records of cull and count data will continue throughout the period and these details will be provided centrally so results can be included in future DMP updates which will be available on the Lochalsh DMG website ([www.lochalshdmg.deer-management.co.uk](http://www.lochalshdmg.deer-management.co.uk))

Habitat Assessment recording, which will begin in the summer of 2016, will continue every few years and will also be stored centrally and results included in future DMP updates.

## 2. Lochalsh Deer Management Group Deer Population

### 2.1 Deer Count Figures

#### 2.1.1 Deer Commission for Scotland Counts

Counts organised by the Deer Commission for Scotland (and more recently by SNH) have occurred across the whole group every few years over the past 50 years. In recent years these counts have been undertaken by helicopter and always occur in early spring, often in heavy snow cover to assist with the count. Data from the last two counts in 2016 and 2009 are shown below.

Please note that due to the heavy woodland cover, the Forestry Commission land is not involved with those counts. However they do carry out their own alternative counts.

The open hill Estates also undertake their own individual counts at different times of year. These counts vary in their scale and frequency across the Estates and therefore cannot be shown comparatively. However they have still been shown to be very useful at Estate level as it is considered that they tend to represent deer numbers more accurately out with heavy snowfall periods and therefore have been included in section 2.1.2 below.

Recent DCS counts have been shown for each Estate below.

#### Achnashellach

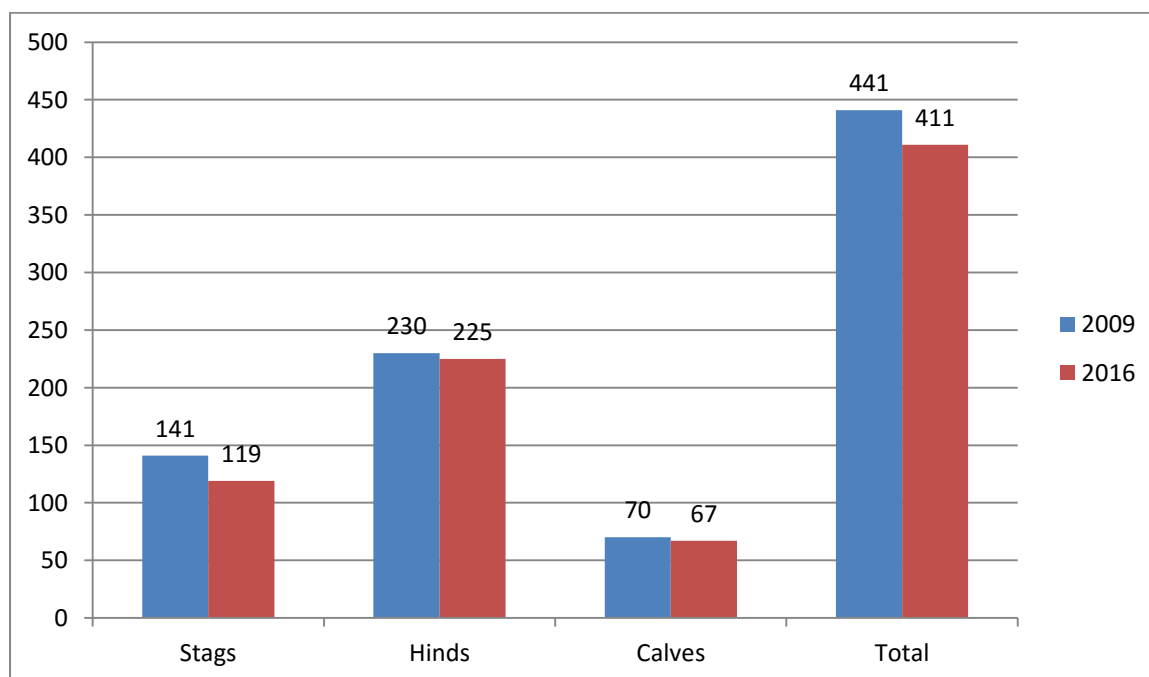


Figure 1- DCS Spring Counts for Achnashellach Estate

#### Arineckaig

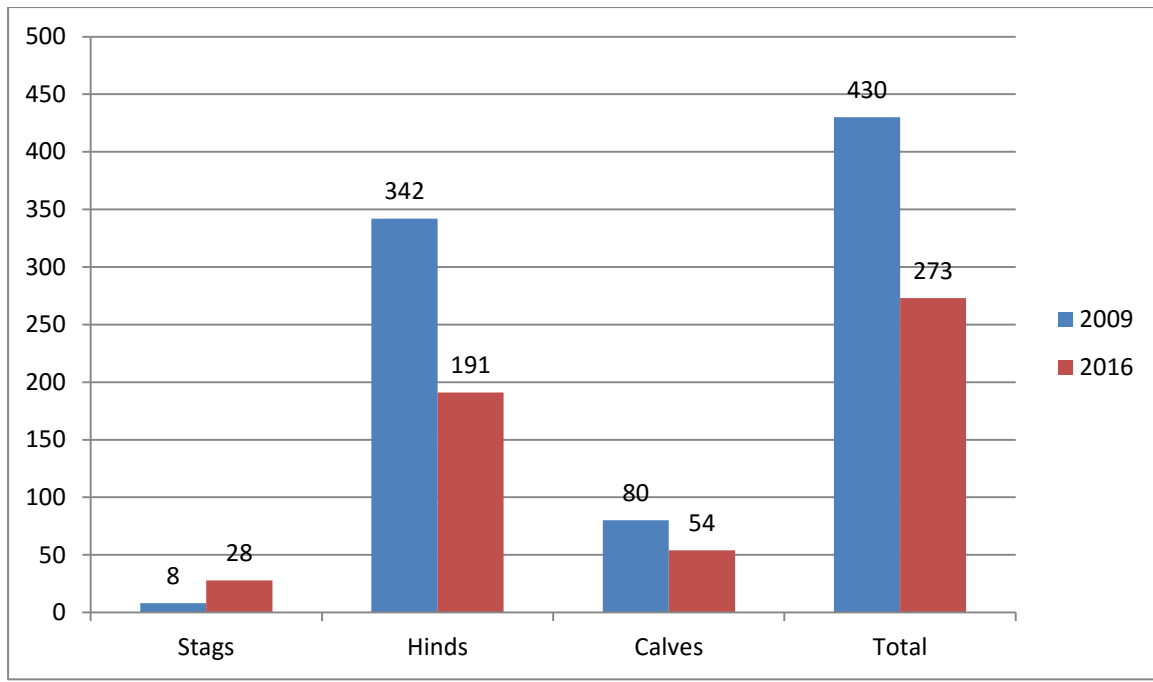


Figure 2- DCS Spring Counts for Arineckaig Estate

Attadale Estate

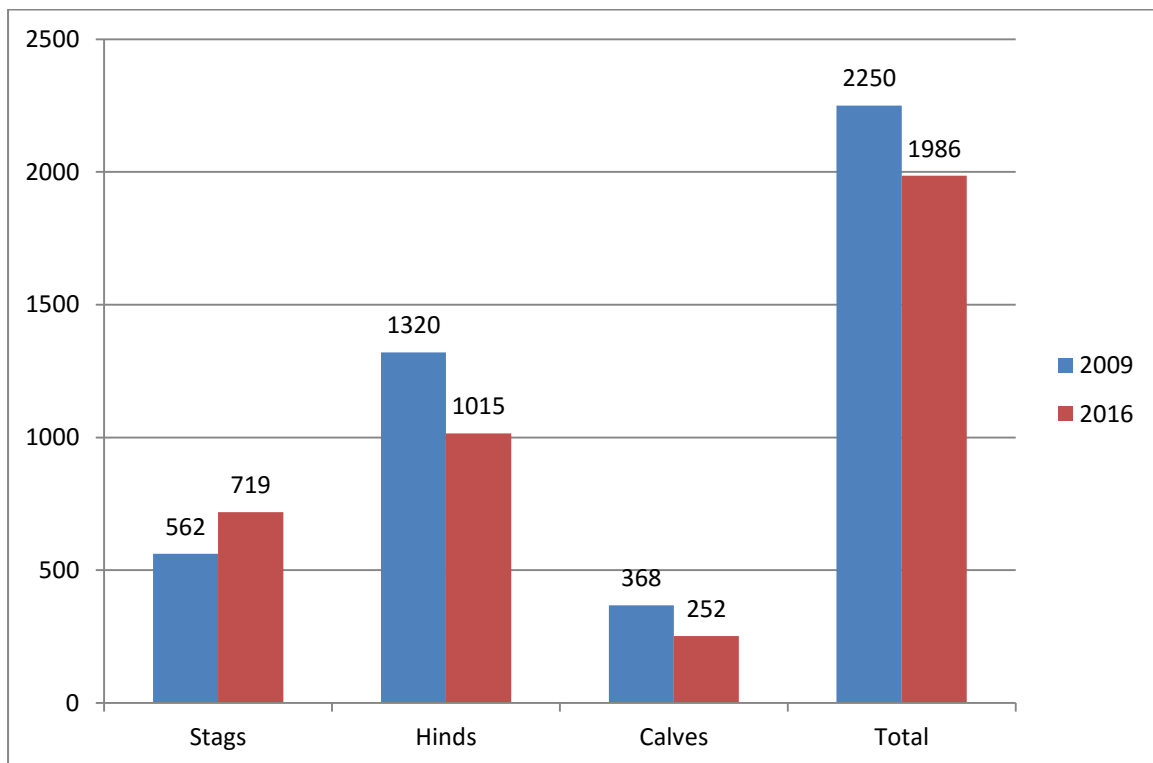


Figure 3- DCS Spring Counts for Attadale Estate

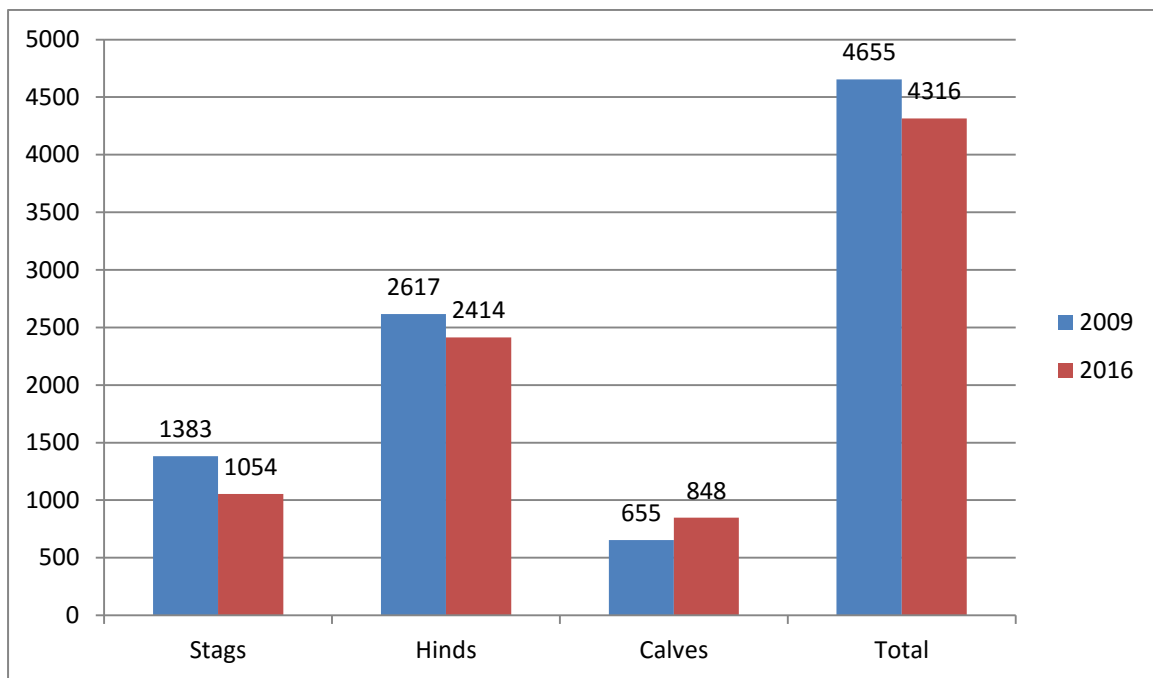
Inverinate Estate

Figure 4-DCS Counts for Inverinate Estate

### 2.1.2 Individual Estate Deer Counts

#### Achnashellach Estate

Achnashellach has undertaken summer counts every year of both the north and south beats of the Estate. The counts are undertaken on foot by the stalker, Chris Mackenzie. The chart below shows the counts from the south beat only as the south beat is the only beat included in this DMG.

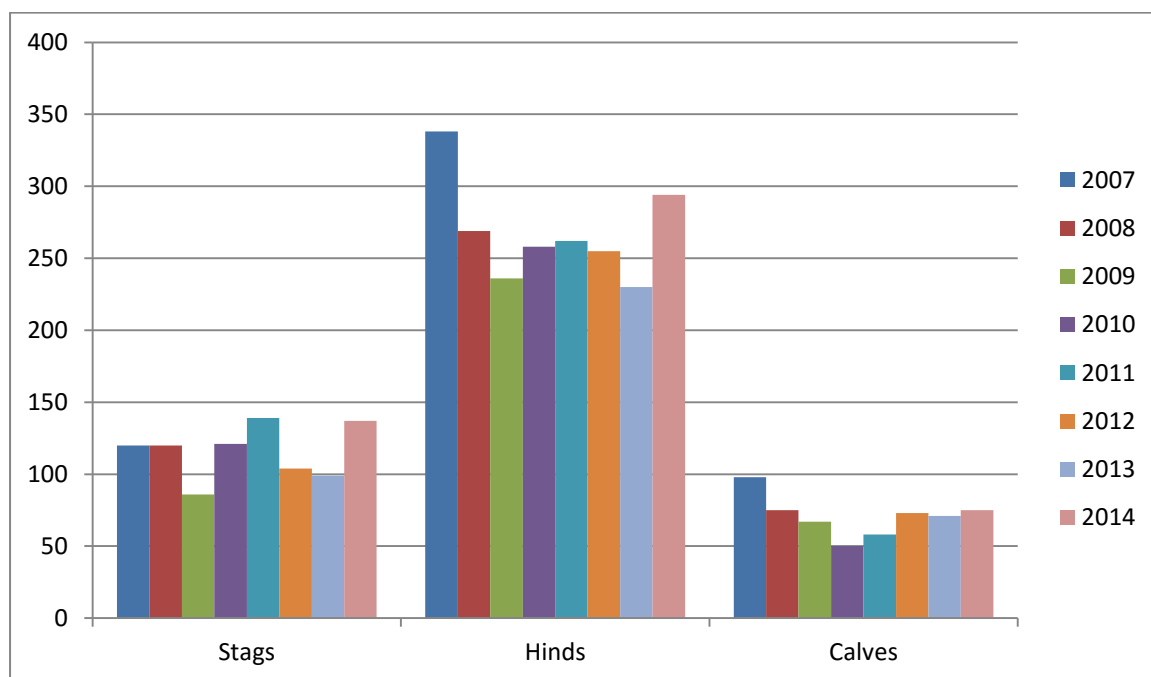


Figure 5- Achnashellach summer counts-south beat only

#### Arineckaig Estate

Due to the small size of Arineckaig relative to its neighbours, deer numbers tend to reflect weather or other disturbances. Individual counts therefore may have limited relevance but general observations are noted throughout the year.

Attadale Estate

Attadale has undertaken a late spring count of the three key deer holding areas for over 15 years. These counts are done on foot by the Stalker and concentrate on the Far Corries, the slopes of Lurg Mhor above Loch Calavie and on Beinn Dronaig. The main reason for the count is that a lot of deer pull into Attadale during the winter and as a result often the numbers shown for the DCS counts undertaken in the spring do not reflect the numbers present during the summer. So this count is helpful when trying to determine deer cull numbers as most of the culling activity occurs in these count areas during the season.

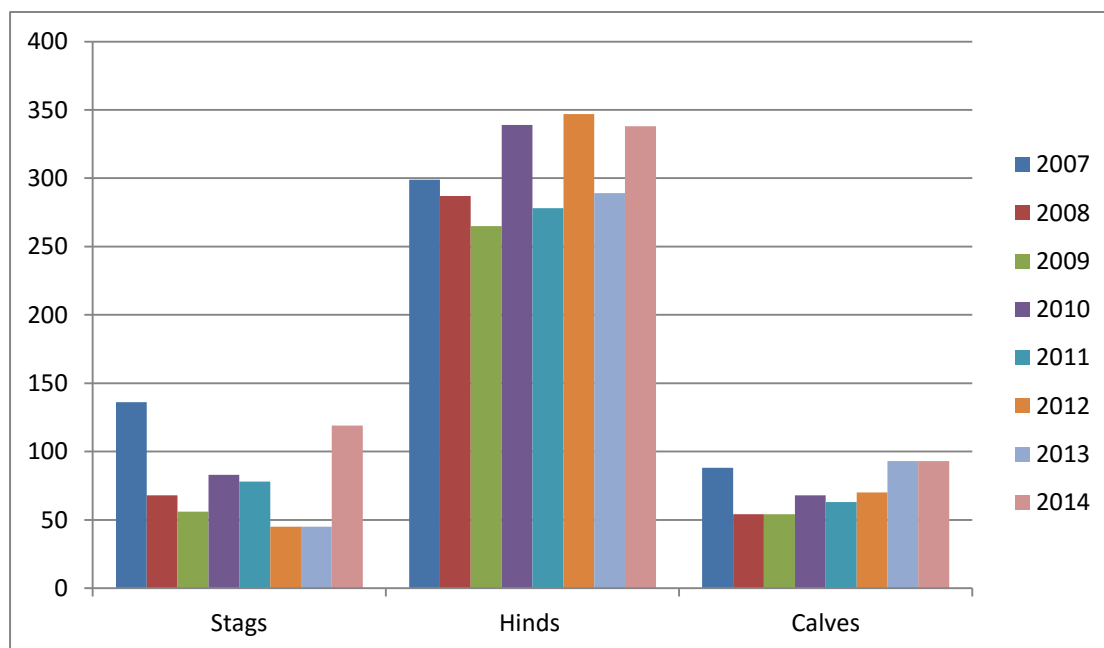


Figure 6- Attadale-Far Corries and Calavie Boat summer count

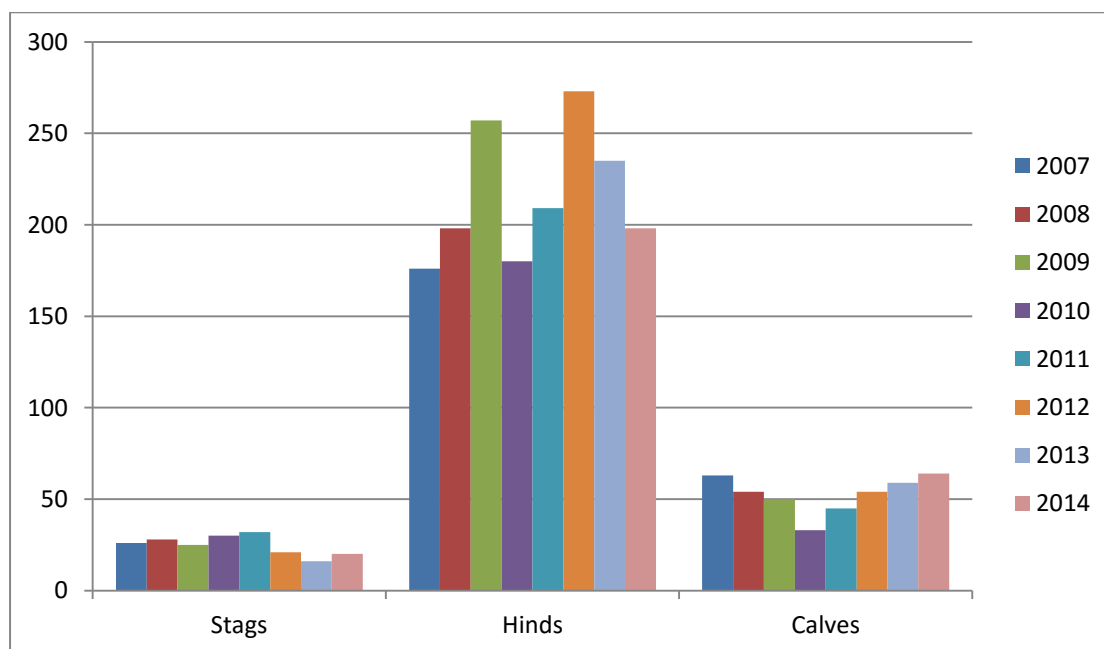


Figure 7- Attadale-Beinn Dronaig summer count

### Inverinate Estate

Inverinate Estate tries to undertake regular spring counts by a mixture of helicopter and on foot. However these counts are dependent on the weather being suitable at the appropriate times. Available data for the past few years is shown below.

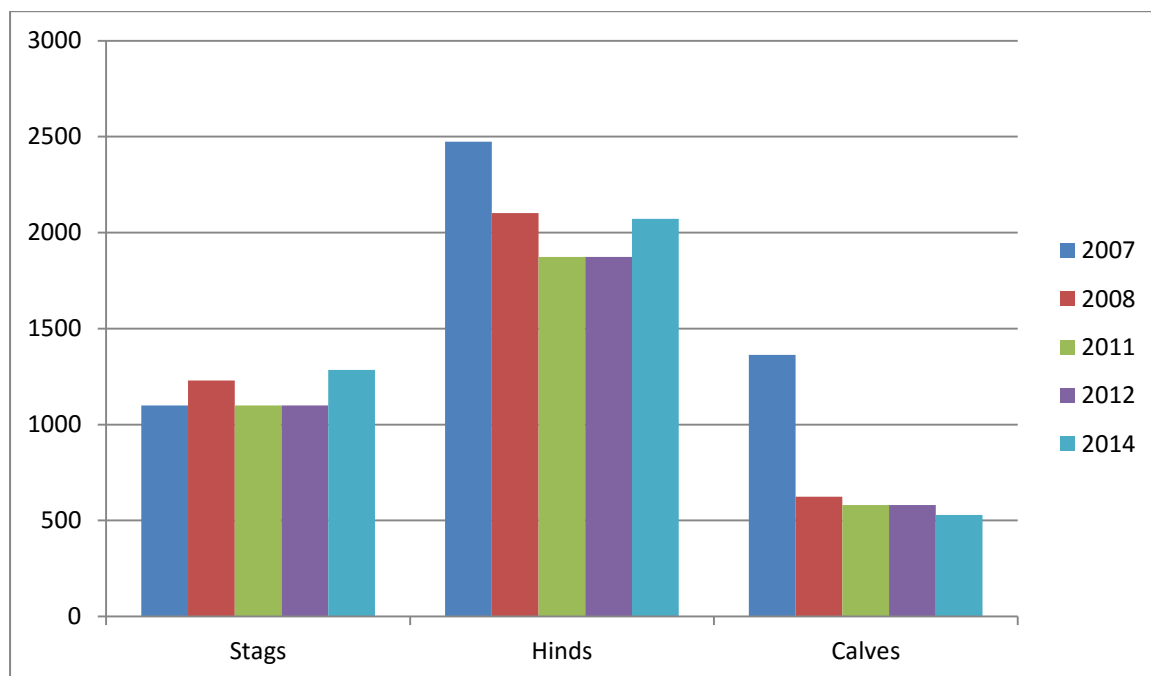


Figure 8- Inverinate spring counts

### Forestry Commission- Achnashellach

The Forestry Commission undertakes dung counting to ascertain its deer levels within the woodland area. The last count was done in 2009 and was estimated at 16 deer per 100ha.

## 2.2 Deer Cull Figures

Annual Deer culls to date have been organised at Estate level and cull numbers are decided based on annual count data, annual recruitment levels and annual spring mortality levels.

As a whole the DMG does not support the 1:1 sex ratio for total deer population recommended for achieving Sporting Culls (ie producing a certain number of mature males) as the group's aim is to manage numbers of both deer sexes to protect their welfare and the surrounding environment rather than for the purpose of a 'Set Sporting cull target'. The cull also aims to provide for the needs of the individual Estates.

All the Estates have kept detailed records of the deer cull for many years. Cull figures for red deer during the last 8 years are shown in the tables below. Numbers in brackets were animals shot out of season.

*Table 1- Achnashellach deer cull figures*

Year	STAGS	HINDS	CALVES	TOTAL
2007	18	44	24	86
2008	20	18	7	45
2009	14	23	9	46
2010	10	13	3	26
2011	15	17	10	42
2012	14	17	12	43
2013	18	23	12	53
2014	23	35	13	71

*Table 2- Arineckaig deer cull figures*

Year	STAGS	HINDS	CALVES	TOTAL
2007	7	2	1	10
2008	8	5	2	15
2009	7	3	2	12
2010	8	5	1	14
2011	13	5	1	19
2012	15	7	2	24
2013	10	6	3	19
2014	9	9	6(4)	28

*Table 3- Attadale deer cull figures*

Year	STAGS	HINDS	CALVES	TOTAL
2007	64(8)	89(1)	45(1)	208
2008	70(25)	58	24	177
2009	76(13)	89	45	223
2010	63(2)	58	38	161
2011	65(3)	51	22	141
2012	60(6)	66(3)	38(3)	176
2013	69(8)	68(1)	27	173
2014	71(15)	79	36	201



*Table 4- Inverinate deer cull figures*

Year	STAGS	HINDS	CALVES	TOTAL
2007	233	444	201	878
2008	197	275	86	558
2009	235	257	130	622
2010	206	138	53	397
2011	150	200	61	411
2012	152	207	85	444
2013	149	204	81	434
2014	165	259	123	547

*Table 5- Forestry Commission- Achnashellach Forest (North and South)*

Year	STAGS	HINDS	CALVES	TOTAL
2007	50	40	18	108
2008	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN
2009	61	35	46	142
2010	64	44	36	142
2011	24	9	4	37
2012	20	21	12	53
2013	30	14	3	47
2014	67	21	7	95

NB- These Cull figures relate to the forest cull on both sides of the road, therefore the actual figure for the south side of the road only would be less. 2008 has no records due to computer error.

## 2.3 Natural Mortality

The DMG does not undertake formal mortality recording. Stalkers on the four 'open hill' Estates do tend to record any mortality seen for their own interest.

The mortality records on the 'open hill' Estates over the years have indicated that most years there is not a high level of mortality found across the group. The mortality figures tend to reflect the winter/spring weather. If it has been an unusually wet winter/spring, the number of dead beasts found tends to be higher. An example of this is was Spring 2015 when mortality was far higher than normal and this was due to the late winter storms and wet spring.

The Forestry Commission has observed that due to the good habitat and shelter within the woodland area natural mortality is normally very low.

## 2.4 Fertility/Calving Rates

Fertility rates in the past have been roughly calculated based on the counts undertaken by the 'open hill' Estates. On average calving rates range from about 25%-35% with success very much dependant on annual climatic conditions.

The Forestry Commission only note fertility rates based on observations during the processing of female deer which have been shot.

## 2.5 Other deer species

The primary deer population on the 'open hill' Estates is Red Deer. Sika are occasionally seen, particularly close to/or in forest plantations and Roe are also present in small numbers within the forest plantations and native woodland.

The Sika and Roe populations are not at a level which has required a regular culling programme on the 'open hill' Estates, so no culling targets have been set although both species are occasionally culled with a specific emphasis on Sika due to their non-native status.

Within the Forestry Commission land, Red Deer are also the main species and a regular culling program is followed to manage the population. Like the 'open hill' Estates, Roe and Sika are also present. The FC do cull a few Roe Deer each year and as part of its commitment to Scotland's wild deer strategy aims to limit the spread and population build-up of the Sika by shooting as many as possible when seen.

## 2.6 Other grazing species

Achnashellach does not have any other grazing species such as sheep or cows on the hill, however some sheep and cattle are found on the flats around Balnacra and Coulags.

Since June 2015, Attadale has been in partnership with Torgorm Estates and in the summer of 2015 50 cattle were summered on the flats at Beinn Dronaig and 300 gimmers were summered on the 'Meall a Chapuill' hill area by Beinn Dronaig.

The entire Arineckaig hill is subject to crofting tenure, mostly as common grazing. Currently the number of sheep is thought to be around 300. It is noted that the majority of the grazing impact is concentrated in the river flats and the lower north facing slopes of Carn Mor.

On Inverinate there is a small herd of feral goats (c.150 head) and the Estate also runs its own flocks of Black-faced and Cheviot sheep and a herd of Highland Cows. As of summer 2015, the flock of Black-faced sheep consisted of 500 ewes (plus lambs in summer) in Glen Elchaig, 400 Cheviot Ewes (plus lambs over summer) in Lienassie (Inverinate) and 120 Cheviot Ewes plus lambs in Glen Ling. The herd of Highland cattle consist of 50 head in Glen Elchaig for most of the year and up to 50 young cattle in Glen Ling from May until December.

## 2.7 Supplementary Feeding

Achnashellach undertakes supplementary feeding in the Glen Uig area of the south beat between late October and late April. The feeding is restricted to feed blocks and it is thought that it may attract approximately 40 stags.

Arineckaig does not undertake any supplementary feeding.

Attadale provides 'Energyze' molasses blocks at 9 sites spread throughout the wintering range of the stag population and the blocks are provided from late October until late April.

Inverinate provides a variety of supplementary foods at several locations throughout the three beats. Silage bales are provided at 12 sites from January to the end of April and are replaced as required. A 'Rumevite' block is also provided at each of the 12 sites and renewed every fortnight. 5 bags of cobs per day from November until the end of April are put out in Glen Ling and 5 bags per day in Glen Elchaig for the deer, predominantly stags. 3 bags of cobs per day are also provided for the deer between Inverinate and Lienassie from November until the end of April.

The Forestry Commission does not undertake any supplementary feeding.

## 3. Deer related Infrastructure/Accreditation and Workforce skills

### 3.1 Deer related Infrastructure/Accreditation

Achnashellach, Attadale and Inverinate and the Forestry Commission all have deer larders. Due to the low number of deer shot at Arineckaig, they use the larder at Attadale.

#### Achnashellach

Achnashellach has one larder which is located at Craig. The larder has been fully modernised and contains a work room and a separate chiller. The larder and the procedures undertaken in the larder by the deer stalker have been annually inspected and 'approved' under the Scottish Quality Venison Assurance (SQVA) Scheme since the time it was modernised.

#### Attadale

Attadale Estate had a new larder constructed in 2002. The larder has two rooms which consist of a work area and a separate chiller area. The larder and the procedures undertaken in the larder by the deer stalker have been annually inspected and 'approved' under the Scottish Quality Venison Assurance (SQVA) Scheme since the time it was built.

#### Inverinate

Inverinate has two larders. One is located at Killian and is used by the Killian and West Benula beats. The other is located at Inverinate Square and is used by the Inverinate beat. Both larders were fully renovated in 2007/8 to modern standards with each having a work area and separate chiller.

Both larders and the procedures undertaken by the deer stalkers in those larders are inspected annually and have been 'approved' under the Scottish Quality Venison Assurance (SQVA) Scheme since the time they were renovated.

### **Forestry Commission**

The Forestry Commission use two larders for all its deer processing. These are the Forestry Commission owned larder at Achmore and the SNH owned larder at Kinlochewe.

Both larders and the procedures undertaken by the deer stalkers in those larders are inspected annually and are 'approved' under the Scottish Quality Venison Assurance (SQVA) Scheme.

## **3.2 Workforce Skills**

Staff members of the individual Estates that make up the DMG currently hold the following deer related qualifications:

Estate	Staff member	Qualification	Date Qualified	Expiry Date
Achnashellach	Stalker Chris Mackenzie	Deer Stalking Certificate- Level 1	17/12/03	n/a
	Stalker Chris Mackenzie	Deer Stalking Certificate- Level 2	11/12/2005	n/a
	Stalker Chris Mackenzie	SNH Fit and Competent Status (renewed every 5 yrs)	16/7/2012	16/7/2017

Estate	Staff member	Qualification	Date Qualified	Expiry Date
Arineckaig	Part time Stalker Donald Mackenzie	Deer Stalking Certificate- Level 1	1/01/2006	n/a
	Part time Stalker Donald Mackenzie	Deer Stalking Certificate- Level 2	27/04/2007	n/a
	Part time Stalker Donald Mackenzie	SNH Fit and Competent Status (renewed every 5 yrs)	27/01/2016	27/01/2021

Estate	Staff member	Qualification	Date Qualified	Expiry Date
Attadale	Stalker Tom Watson	Deer Stalking Certificate- Level 1	13/12/2000	n/a
	Stalker Tom Watson	Deer Stalking Certificate- Level 2	7/03/2002	n/a
	Stalker Tom Watson	SNH Fit and Competent Status (renewed every 5 yrs)	14/10/2015	14/10/2020
	Part time Stalker Thomas Watson	HND Gamekeeping	1989	n/a
	Part time Stalker Thomas Watson	Deer Stalking Certificate- Level 1	2005	n/a

Estate	Staff member	Qualification	Date Qualified	Expiry Date
Inverinate	Killian Beat Stalker Dean Baillie	Deer Stalking Certificate- Level 1	5/03/2010	n/a
	Inverinate Beat Stalker Duncan MacLeod	Deer Stalking Certificate- Level 2	26/05/2005	n/a
	West Benula Beat Stalker Arran Matheson	Deer Stalking Certificate- Level 1	8/12/2005	n/a
	Inverinate Beat Stalker Duncan MacLeod	SNH Fit and Competent Status (renewed every 5 yrs)	31/01/11	Feb 2021
	Estate Manager Andrew Slaughter	Deer Stalking Certificate- Level 2	26/05/2005	n/a
	Estate Manager Andrew Slaughter	SNH Fit and Competent Status (renewed every 5 yrs)	31/01/11	Feb 2021

Estate	Staff member	Qualification	Date Qualified	Expiry Date
Forestry Commission- Achnashellach	John Weir (SNH Stalker)	Deer Stalking Certificate- Level 1	25/5/2012	n/a
	John Weir (SNH Stalker)	Deer Stalking Certificate- Level 2	26/9/2012	n/a
	John Weir (SNH Stalker)	SNH Fit and Competent Status (renewed every 5 yrs)	2/08/2012	2/08/2017
	Russell Cooper Wildlife Ranger Mgr	Deer Stalking Certificate- Level 1	4/4/2000	n/a
	Russell Cooper Wildlife Ranger Mgr	Deer Stalking Certificate- Level 2	27/11/2000	n/a
	Russell Cooper Wildlife Ranger Mgr	SNH Fit and Competent Status (renewed every 5 yrs)	13 Nov 2015	13/11/2020

**NB-** Many of the above deer related qualifications have only been around for a few years and as a result many of the stalkers with years of experience have only been able to achieve these qualifications well into their professional careers.

## **4. Natural History of Group area**

Professor RJ Putman provided a very detailed record of the geology, soils and vegetation of the DMG (excluding the FC area) in his 2007-2012 DMP. As the geology, soils and vegetation remain unchanged and a copy of his previous DMP has been included under Appendix 3, it is not considered necessary to repeat the same detailed information in this DMP.

However a brief summary of what he recorded is shown below.

### **4.1 Geology and soils**

Professor RJ Putman noted that the geology of the area is dominated by quartz-feldspar granulite; however it also includes some areas of Lewisian gneiss and mica-schist.

Soils were predominantly peaty podzols, peaty gleys, peaty rankers and peat, with some brown podzolic soils found at lower altitudes and on steeper slopes and alpine soils at higher altitudes.

### **4.2 Vegetation**

Professor RJ Putman noted that as with much of the highlands, the principal vegetational communities associated with this DMG area are the classic upland communities of blanket mire, wet grass-heaths, drier heaths and Festuca-Agrostis grasslands. He also noted that the DMG supports some significant areas of wind-clipped, or moss heath on summit ridges and native woodland.

### **4.3 Non grazing impacts on vegetation**

Professor RJ Putman noted in his report that the nature of the current open hill vegetation has been affected by past and present management such as domestic and wild stock grazing as well as periodic muirburn.

Both Attadale and Inverinate Estate have undertaken occasional muirburn in the recent past when time and weather conditions permitted. Due to limited opportunities when this can occur, when it is possible, the areas burnt tend to be of a reasonable size compared to the strip burning undertaken on grouse moors.

## 4.4 Site designations

The DMG contains four sites with designations. One *National Scenic Area* (NSA) and three *Sites of Special Scientific Interest* (SSSI).

Much of the Inverinate Estate home beat is located within the *Kintail National Scenic Area*. The citation notes that the special qualities of the Kintail area which have made it a *National Scenic Area* are:

- *Drama epitomising the West Highland scene*
- *Renowned mountain ranges composed of identifiable, well-known peaks*
- *Human settlement and activity circumscribed and dwarfed by towering hills*
- *A remote and wild interior*
- *The rich heritage of historic sites*
- *An inland coast*
- *A natural, theatrical stage*

A small part of the West Benula beat of Inverinate Estate is located within the Affric-Cannich Hills SSSI. This area has been designated as an SSSI due to its “geological interest, remnant ancient pinewoods and diversity of upland plant communities, reflecting both western and eastern climatic influences”. The last assessment of the site by SNH considered that the site condition was ‘mixed’.

A small part of the Achnashellach Estate South beat is located within the Monar Forest SSSI. This area has been designated as it “supports an extensive assemblage of upland habitats”. The last assessment of the site by SNH considered that the site condition was ‘favourable’.

Attadale Estate contains a geological SSSI which is located on the cliffs above the road which runs along the north side of Loch Carron. The site is designated as it is “a supreme locality for exhibiting the development of the basal conglomerate within the Moine Series – a phenomenon known from only a very few sites in Scotland”. The last assessment of the site by SNH considered that the site condition was ‘favourable’.

Full details of all the designations can be found in Appendix 4.

## 4.5 Historic Sites

There is only one scheduled ancient monument within the DMG. The site is known as “*St Dubhthach’s Church and Burial Ground (SM9207) (Inverinate)*”. Refer to Appendix 4 for further info.



## **5. Public Access and Public Welfare**

### **5.1 Provision on Estates for Recreational Activities**

Currently there is no DMG wide policy or actions on providing information on walking routes, details about where and when stalking is taking place etc.

However all the individual Estates welcome walkers and cyclists throughout the year and in most cases already provide facilities and/or information by a variety of means.

#### **Achnashellach**

The Estate has provided details on recommended routes, stalking dates and contact details to the SNH 'Heading for the Scottish Hills' website. Information boards are also provided at the start of the main public footpaths through the Estate detailing stalking activities and contact details. The Estate owns Bearneas Bothy and the bothy is managed by the Mountain Bothies Association. The bothy is open all year to passing walkers.

#### **Arineckaig**

Arineckaig is bounded on one side by an actively used long distance path for which parking is available. It has, however, no high hills and other provision for parking can conflict with crofting activities. However there is ample area beside the road which travels up the Arineckaig glen should visitors wish to stop and go for a walk or cycle.

#### **Attadale Estate**

Attadale Estate has provided a free car park for visitors at the entrance to the Estate for the past 15 years. The car park can accommodate approximately 10 cars. Dog waste bags and a disposal service for those bags are also provided for visitor's dogs. The car park area contains a map of the Estate which highlights the recommended routes (to minimise disturbance to deer throughout the year) for the three popular routes up the Munros' of Lurg Mhor and Bidean a' Choire Sheasgaich and the Corbett Beinn Dronaig. Contact details for the Stalker are also provided.

During the stag stalking season information regarding which days stalking will take place is placed weekly by the map. The Estate has provided details on recommended routes, stalking dates and contact details to the SNH 'Heading for the Scottish Hills' website.

Information on several walks around the Estate is also contained within the Attadale Estate website ([www.attadale.com](http://www.attadale.com)).

The former stalker's house at Beinn Dronaig has always been left open as a shelter for passing walkers. It was renovated in the late 1990's and continues to be left open all year as a free shelter. It is a private building and is not part of the Mountain Bothies Association network.

Trout Fishing is also available on any of the hill lochs found on the Estate for any visitors willing to walk to them. No boats or transport is provided.

### **Inverinate**

Inverinate has provided free parking at the entrance to Killian Estate for many years and it is intended that a map detailing the Estate paths, stalking dates, livestock locations and other general advice will be erected soon.

The Estate owns Maol Bhuidhe Bothy. The bothy is managed by the Mountain Bothies Association and is available for passing walkers to use. It is not available during the stag stalking season.

Parking is also available for visitors wishing to access the Inverinate beat at Lienassie, Clachan Duich and An Leth Allt. Relevant signage is proposed at those sites also.

### **Forestry Commission**

The Forestry Commission has a policy of encouraging the public to use their forests. While no formal paths are provided in Achnashellach, the public are welcome to use the access tracks to access the forest and the hills beyond.

## **5.2 Public Welfare**

### **5.2.1 Deer Vehicle Collisions**

Deer Vehicle Collisions (DVC's) are a concern to all for both public welfare and animal welfare reasons. These concerns are also highlighted in the 'Deer Collisions Project' website ([www.deercollisions.co.uk](http://www.deercollisions.co.uk)). They note that:

- DVC's pose a safety hazard to road users, and lead to substantial damage to cars and numerous human injuries as well as a number of human fatalities in most years
- DVC's pose a major animal welfare issue, because a high proportion of deer which are hit by cars are not killed outright: many have to be put down at the roadside, while others escape to die later of their injuries.

Actions taken by the DMG at Estate level (if required) to manage deer collisions are summarised below:

### **Achnashellach**

The A890 cuts through the middle of the Estate for approximately two miles. Records of deer collisions on this stretch are thought to be very low due to the open nature of the land around the road in that area. In addition 'Deer aware' signs have been erected along the roadside by the Highland Council.

### Arineckaig

A single track dead-end minor public road extends two miles as access into the Arineckaig estate. Limited local traffic and the low speeds only feasible over much of the road means there have been no recorded deer related collisions and no additional measures would appear to be required.

### Attadale

Attadale had no public roads through the Estate, but the A890 runs along its southern boundary on the shore of Loch Carron. However due to the Natural Regeneration area at Achintee, the native planted area on the Maman, east of the avalanche shelter and the larch wood and mixed woodland along the bypass between the avalanche shelter and Ardnarff, the whole route is deer fenced and therefore it is very rare for deer to wander onto the road. These fences are regularly checked to ensure they remain secure.

### Inverinate

Inverinate has no public roads through its three beats, however the A87 runs along its southern boundary. The whole boundary along the road has been deer fenced to specifically stop deer wandering onto the road and as of summer 2015, the fence is being upgraded.

### Forestry Commission

The main A890 road through the forest area of Achnashellach was previously a priority DCS site due to deer collision issues. The FC undertook an increased cull in the area of the road to help reduce numbers and as a result collisions have greatly reduced. The FC will continue to monitor and where necessary cull deer near to road to minimise RTA's.

## **5.2.2 Lyme Disease**

DMG staff members are generally aware of the potential risks of Lyme disease and are also aware of the best ways to remove ticks and symptoms to look out for. However organised education by the DMG to staff members has never been given.

DMG staff members have provided advice to members of the public on tick removal if asked; however no formal group policy is in place with regards to assisting the public with this matter.

## 6. Future Management of the group area

### 6.1 ADMG/SNH Benchmark

In August 2014, the DMG undertook an initial assessment against the ADMG/SNH Benchmark to help it assess where the group was at with regards to the Benchmark's fourteen areas of recommended actions.

A summary is found below:

	Action	What is DMG doing now?	What will DMG do in the future?
1	Actions to develop mechanisms to manage deer.	Benchmark self-assessment carried out on August 14 2014. DMG currently has no up to date DMP.	DMG to develop DMP by 2015 with habitat reports to follow
2	Actions for the delivery of designated features into favourable conditions.	Not currently recorded.	Set out designated features across DMG in DMP and if any features are impacted by deer agree management actions to address issue where possible.
3	Actions to manage deer to retain existing woodland cover and improve woodland condition in the medium to long term.	Most group members are addressing woodland issues, however not currently recorded in a DMP.	DMG to work with SNH to identify existing native woodland and DMP to set out actions to address any negative deer impacts.
4	Actions to demonstrate DMG contribution to the Scottish Government expansion target of 25% woodland cover.	A number of new woodland schemes have already been created across the DMG; however they are not formally recorded.	DMP will set out existing and proposed schemes and any further actions required to deliver woodland expansion proposals.
5	Actions to monitor and manage deer impacts in the wider countryside.	Although some monitoring done by individual members, not currently recorded.	DMP will capture extent of current and assess whether enough. May look at standardised monitoring programme.

	Action	What DMG doing now?	What will DMG do in the future?
6	Actions to improve Scotland's ability to store carbon by maintaining or improving ecosystem health.	Existing woodland extent and some habitat monitoring being carried out.	DMP to identify how woodland and any other habitats might contribute and incorporate a monitoring programme.
7	Actions to reduce or mitigate the risk of establishment of invasive non-native species.	Partially actioned through discussion at meetings	DMP will reference and action plan/minutes of meetings will capture.
8	Actions to protect designated historic and cultural features from being damaged by deer eg trampling.	Not considered to be an issue.	DMG will discuss and DMP will address.
9	Actions to contribute to delivering higher standards of competence in deer management.	Members well trained but details not formally recorded.	Training policy to be set out in DMP and action plan/meeting minutes can address and report on required actions.
10	Actions to identify and promote opportunities contributing to public health and well-being.	Some issues dealt with by DMG but not recorded in DMP.	DMP will reference and action plan/minutes of meetings will capture.
11	Actions to maximise economic benefits associated with deer	Some estates actively market local venison but generally economic benefits not captured.	DMG will discuss what information would be useful to collect and discuss potential options. DMP to capture.
12	Actions to minimise the economic costs of deer and ensure deer management is cost-effective.	DMG is aware of and responsive to potential negative impacts by deer and undertake a range of work to help minimise these costs although this is not recorded in a DMP.	DMG will discuss and consider what information would be useful to collect and discuss potential options. DMP to capture.

	Action	What DMG doing now?	What will DMG do in the future?
13	Actions to ensure effective communication on deer management issues.	No current communications policy	DMP to include Communications Policy. Will provide completed DMP to ADMG and other relevant parties.
14	Actions to ensure deer welfare is taken fully into account at individual animal and population level.	Welfare is currently safeguarded in DMG through members following the Best Practice Guidance on the Management of Wild Deer in Scotland manual and the existing high skill level in the group.	DMG will discuss and agree what information the Group would like to capture and on what time scale. DMP will record.

A copy of the full assessment can be found in Appendix 5.

Overall it was considered during that initial assessment that many of the recommended actions were already taking place, but were not written down or recorded at the DMG level.

The completion of this DMP has successfully achieved most of the Benchmark criteria actions and any that are still to be achieved will be included as future actions in the DMP.

A copy of the second assessment undertaken by SNH on the completion of this DMP in June 2016 has also been included in Appendix 5.

## 6.2 Actions undertaken by DMG in response to the Benchmark Criteria

Listed below are the details on how the DMG aims to achieve the 14 Benchmark Criteria Actions. In some cases (ie habitat assessments), actions are planned but yet to be fully executed.

### 6.2.1 Action 1

#### *Actions to develop mechanisms to manage deer*

This Deer Plan has been prepared in accordance with the Benchmark Criteria outlined above for the Lochalsh Deer Management Group. This will be a live, rolling plan which will evolve over time as circumstances change and will be regularly reviewed. The plan, once completed will be available on the [www.lochalshdmg.deer-management.co.uk](http://www.lochalshdmg.deer-management.co.uk) website. Any minutes from DMG meetings will also be publicly available on the same website.

### 6.2.2 Action 2

#### *Actions for the delivery of designated features into favourable conditions*

The DMG contains four sites with designations, one *National Scenic Area* (NSA) and three *Sites of Special Scientific Interest* (SSSI) (refer to section 4.4 of this plan for further details). Two of the SSSI's are considered in 'favourable' condition by SNH. However in its last assessment, the Affric-Strathglass SSSI was considered in 'mixed condition' and as a result, affected landowners did offer up and work on proposals alongside SNH to help return it to a favourable condition.

A new assessment had been planned for the summer of 2015, however it did not happen and the assessment is now proposed for summer 2016.

It is proposed that no further actions will be undertaken until this assessment is done and should any future SNH assessment of this or any of the other sites determine that the site is not in a 'favourable' condition; the DMG/individual land holder will work with SNH to agree objectives to try and bring the site back into a favourable condition.

### 6.2.3 Action 3

#### *Actions to manage deer to retain existing native woodland cover and improve woodland condition in the medium to long term*

SNH provided a map (National Forest Inventory-Woodlands) which identifies areas considered to be woodland within the DMG area. The map can be found under Appendix 6. The map notes that of the total 3988.6ha of woodland found in the Lochalsh DMG, 1731ha is conifers, 740ha is assumed woodland (most likely recent fenced regen and/or planted), 573 is broadleaves and 192ha is young trees with smaller areas of other woodland types.

SNH also provided a map (refer to Appendix 7) which shows areas of native woodland (mostly unfenced) within the DMG area and indicates the herbivore pressure that area is under. Of the 1248ha identified, 526ha was considered as having low herbivore pressure, 191ha had medium herbivore pressure, 167ha had high herbivore pressure and 364ha had very high herbivore pressure.

The DMG will aim to have the woodland areas reassessed during the next 10 years and consider what herbivores are the likely causes of those pressures and if possible undertake actions to help reduce pressure in the medium to long term to ensure the majority of those native woodland areas are achieving low to medium pressure levels to secure this important resource. Any actions taken will be discussed at DMG meetings and recorded in the minutes.

### 6.2.4 Action 4

#### *Actions to demonstrate DMG contribution to the Scottish Government expansion target of 25% woodland cover*

During the past 25 years, a variety of woodland schemes have been implemented across the group, these have been a mixture of natural regeneration areas and planted areas which were all deer fenced. Between the four 'open hill' members approximately 550ha has been fenced and either planted with a mix of native broadleaves and Scots Pines or regenerated from woodland within that fenced area or as a result of native woodland close to the fenced site. The main aim of the schemes was to re-establish woodland; however it was also considered that in the future, once tree levels

have reached a suitable size and quantity, the fences can be removed and these areas of woodland will also provide vital forage and shelter for the deer. A map showing the scheme areas is enclosed in Appendix 8 and further details of the schemes can be found under section 1.4 of this plan.

As can be seen by the map, the sites for regeneration/planting that were selected were sites thought more likely to succeed in west coast conditions. The majority of the sites are at lower altitudes and/or often tucked in to small glens where there is more shelter, existing woodland nearby and slightly better soils. Sites were also designed to ensure that all the lower ground was not fenced off to ensure that deer still had plenty low ground areas for shelter during the winter months.

Due to the increased exposure and poor soils, much of the higher open hill is not considered suitable for regeneration/planting schemes and has therefore not been planted.

As any funding of such schemes is done at Estate level, any future schemes will be determined by the individual owners. However, as can be seen by the previous schemes implemented, all 'open hill' members of the group, like the Scottish Government, are committed to the expansion of woodland cover in Scotland and will continue to look at sites for future schemes and will implement them as and when it is possible.

Within the Forestry Commission land at Achnashellach, most of the site was mainly commercial coniferous forest with areas of remnant Scots Pine and Birch. In the past few years, large areas of the commercial forest have been felled and more felling is planned. A new Land Management Plan has been proposed for the period 2015-2025. The vision of the plan is *"To restore Achnashellach to a sustainable native woodland ecosystem that compliments the scenic beauty of the Wester Ross landscape, whilst supporting and providing opportunities for rural development"*. One of the main aims of the new plan is *"Restoration of Caledonian Pinewood, broadleaf woodland and open habitat within the Carron valley over the next fifty years"*. As a result, the amount of native woodland within the 800ha Forestry Commission site will greatly increase over the next 50 years and help contribute to the Scottish Government's expansion target.

A copy of the Plan Brief and maps of the future habitat species can be found under Appendix 9.

#### **6.2.5 Action 5**

##### ***Actions to monitor and manage deer impacts in the wider countryside***

In order to monitor the impact of deer on the wider countryside, the DMG plans to begin habitat assessments from the summer of 2016. These assessments will follow the recommended process outlined by SNH.

To date, two main habitats have been identified across the group by SNH, Blanket Bog and Dwarf Shrub Heath. A number of sites for each habitat were randomly selected by SNH and provided as grid reference points. These sites were then identified on maps by DMG staff members. As those locations had not been ground tested, DMG staff members looked at the locations and using local knowledge of ground conditions randomly selected 44 sites per habitat to use in future assessments.

In the early summer of 2016, DMG staff members will undertake the first assessment of the sites and this will assist in starting the process of determining any deer impact on the habitat and associated actions that may be required.



The DMG will undertake assessments of those sites in accordance with the guidelines recommended by SNH to ensure consistent data is gathered. This will ensure that any actions proposed as a result of that data gathered will result in both the deer and the habitat being sustainably managed.

The DMG will ensure that data from assessments and any associated actions will be discussed at DMG meetings, recorded in the minutes and contained in future DMP updates.

#### **6.2.6 Action 6**

##### ***Actions to improve Scotland's ability to store carbon by maintaining or improving ecosystem health.***

As noted under section 1.4, approximately 550ha of land has been set aside in the past 25 years for natural regeneration/native woodland planting schemes. This is on top of the approximate 3988ha of woodland (which is a mixture of native and commercial coniferous forestry) already found within the Lochalsh DMG.

The majority of the rest of the DMG land area available to deer is identified by SNH as blanket bog or dwarf shrub heath.

This expansion in woodland area over the past 25 years will help improve Scotland's ecosystem health as the habitat below the fenced tree areas is highly likely to be in good health due to very low grazing pressure and the increase in tree numbers will help store more carbon.

The Habitat Assessment process proposed under Action 5 of the Benchmark criteria will assist the DMG in determining the health of the blanket bog habitat and if necessary the DMG can implement changes to herbivore numbers if it is considered that large areas of the blanket bog is suffering from grazing/trampling pressures which are considered 'above' the acceptable impact ranges.

The DMG will work closely with SNH to ensure that ecosystem health is maintained (or if required improved) to ensure Scotland's ability to store carbon increases.

#### **6.2.7 Action 7**

##### ***Actions to reduce or mitigate the risk of establishment of invasive non-native species***

Sika deer and Wild Goats are seen in the DMG area and evidence of one wild pig was found at Achnashellach in 2015. There have been no sightings of Muntjac deer.

DMG members will aim to limit the spread and population build-up of the Sika by shooting as many as possible when seen as part of the group's commitment to Scotland's wild deer strategy. They will also adopt the same policy for Muntjac. Wild Pig will be shot if any are seen and Wild Goats (which are mainly located in Inverinate) will continue to be culled annually to try and maintain numbers at the current estimated population of about 150.

### 6.2.8 Action 8

#### *Actions to protect designated historic and cultural features from being damaged by deer eg trampling*

Historic and cultural features within the landscape are important to the group and the group undertakes to protect these from negative impacts by deer. Red deer, because of their size and herding behaviour do have potential to cause negative impacts to such sites.

Highland Council Historic Environment Record lists the Historic Environment Records for the whole Highland Region and there is a variety of historic sites recorded within the Lochalsh DMG range.

There is a selection of listed buildings across the range, most of which are not within the areas accessible to deer and one Scheduled Ancient Monument which is within the accessible red deer range.

That Ancient Monument is:

- St Dubhthach's Church and Burial Ground (SM9207) (Inverinate)

Most of the remaining records relate to undesignated historic site areas.

Grazing can have positive impacts on historic and cultural features by maintaining a low sward and preventing tree and shrub regeneration and thereby maintaining their visibility and context in the landscape. However in heavy concentrations, grazing can potentially damage historic sites. Therefore in order to ensure that historic features are not damaged by large concentrations of deer, Group Members will avoid providing winter feed at sites in locations where there is evidence that this could result in negative impacts on such features.

### 6.2.9 Action 9

#### *Actions to contribute to delivering higher standards of competence in deer management*

All of the stalkers within the DMG are qualified to at least Deer Stalking Certificate Level 1 (DSC1) (Refer to section 3.2 for more details). DSC1 is a largely knowledge based qualification for Stalkers and managers which enables candidates to demonstrate their understanding of basic deer management principles and meat hygiene, and to show competence in shooting at simulated targets. It is a recognised industry standard and is supported by SNH.

Many of the senior Stalkers have also achieved Deer Stalking Certificate Level 2 (DSC2). DSC2 is a practically based qualification which enables candidates to demonstrate their knowledge and competence in legally, safely and humanely culling deer and dealing with carcasses hygienically.

Some of the senior Stalkers, who may be required to shoot deer under authorisations from SNH, have also been approved by SNH as "Fit and Competent". This approval has to be reapplied for every 5 years.

*(Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) issues authorisations under the Deer (Scotland) Act 1996. Authorisations allow individuals to cull deer in circumstances when they would not normally have the legal right to shoot them, for example at night or to prevent deer damaging the natural heritage (natural habitats)).*

The DMG considers that all stalkers working within the group should have the DSC1 qualification as a minimum (or be in training to achieve this qualification) to ensure that high standards of competence in deer management are achieved. The DMG will ensure that at least one stalker on each Estate will be DSC2 qualified and will encourage all stalkers to achieve this status as their career progresses.

Should other recommended qualifications/training courses with regards to Continued Professional Development arise, these will be considered and if appropriate undertaken by the relevant staff members at either Estate or group level.

#### **6.2.10 Action 10**

##### ***Actions to identify and promote opportunities contributing to public health and well-being.***

As noted under section 3.1, all the DMG members' larders and the procedures undertaken within those larders are inspected annually and are 'approved' under the Scottish Quality Venison Assurance (SQVA) Scheme. This ensures that food safety is maintained and carcass handling and venison processing is compliant with the Best Practice Guide.

The DMG will encourage all the group members to ensure that all larders and procedures continue to achieve 'approved' status. If any issues are raised as part of that inspection process, the DMG will encourage the affected group member(s) to address these as soon as possible.

Lyme disease is of particular concern to the DMG as its staff members are at high risk of receiving tick bites and possible infection. The DMG aims to ensure that the risk of Lyme disease is raised regularly at DMG meetings and up to date information is supplied to attendees to ensure all staff members are kept safe. This education of staff members will also ensure that staff can give the best advice they can to any members of the public that discovers a tick bite and asks the staff member for advice. Advice sheets sourced from [www.lymediseaseaction.org.uk](http://www.lymediseaseaction.org.uk) have also been included in this DMP under Appendix 10.

As noted under section 5.1, the DMG, at Estate level, already provides information and facilities associated with recreation for the general public and in some cases have done this for many years. The majority of recreation undertaken within the DMG is hill walking and mountain biking. Fishing and canoeing also occasionally take place.

As of June 2015, the DMG has provided the appropriate information to the newly created 'Heading for the Scottish hills' website organised by SNH. *(The website aims to encourage walkers to plan walking routes during the stag culling season to help minimise the chance of disturbing stalking, which is essential for sustainable deer management).* Group members who have popular hill routes on their ground had also provided information boards at car parks and/or at the start of walking routes which detail preferred walking routes and contact information for the visiting public.

The DMG will encourage group members to continue to provide these recreational facilities and continue to promote positive interaction between the visiting public and themselves.

### 6.2.11 Action 11

#### *Actions to maximise economic benefits associated with deer*

The majority of the DMG members do not lease out their deer stalking and as a result most of income derived from deer culling comes from carcass sales. Currently all the DMG members sell their carcasses to Highland Game, who are based in Dundee, but have local contractors who collect the carcasses for them. The approximate income from carcasses across the group is GBP80,000.

Deer related employment within the group varies on the size of the Estate (refer to section 3.2 of the plan). This ranges from Arineckaig where there is one resident part-time self-employed stalker up to Inverinate, which has a full time stalker for each beat, plus the Estate Manager, who also undertakes stalking. Often temporary staff are taken on during the main stalking seasons (such as extra ghillies or Argo drivers/pony handlers). Currently it is considered unlikely that any of the Estates will require further staff to manage deer numbers.

As noted under section 3.1, all the DMG members' larders and the procedures undertaken within those larders have been modernised (or newly built) and are inspected annually and are 'approved' under the Scottish Quality Venison Assurance (SQVA) Scheme. This ensures that the larders are as environmentally efficient as is currently possible and it also 'adds value' to the product as SQVA members are guaranteed a better price per kilo compared to non SQVA members by Highland Game.

By having refrigerated larders and by using the same Game Dealer (and their collection contractor), carbon costs are reduced and efficiencies are achieved as the same van visits all the larders on designated days rather than lots of different dealers driving to all the larders on different days.

Larder sharing already occurs between Attadale and Arineckaig, and the Forestry Commission shares with SNH. All the above actions will continue to be supported and encouraged by the DMG members to ensure that the maximum economic benefit is achieved.

### 6.2.12 Action 12

#### *Actions to minimise the economic costs of deer and ensure deer management is cost-effective*

All group members invest time and money into the management of deer and its associated infrastructure. Exact figures are difficult to provide as Estate investment tends to cover a variety of tasks eg argocats, although used during the stalking can also be used for feeding hill stock. However it is estimated that the group invests approximately GBP415,000 on an annual basis.

Over the years, members of the DMG have worked hard to ensure that deer do not impact on other land users such as those in agriculture and woodland and on public roads. Members have spent time and money investing in deer fences to protect croft land and regenerating woodland and also DMG staff members have spent time managing deer which have marauded onto agricultural land.

Currently the DMG considers that there are no serious issues with deer impacting on other land users due to previous measures that have been undertaken, however the DMG will continue to monitor the situation and try and address any issues as best as they can if and when they arise.

### 6.2.13 Action 13

#### *Actions to ensure effective communication on deer management issues*

Although there has been no formal communications policy within the group, communication with the wider public is considered to be reasonably good.

The stalkers have regular contact with Crofters and assist them with deer culling on their crofts when required. The Estate owners have also been supportive of woodland restoration schemes on croft land and assisted (when requested) with any associated deer culls as part of those projects.

The DMG members have provided their details to the 'Heading for the Scottish hills' website and stalkers regularly receive phone calls from hill walkers who wish to discuss trips and routes. When out and about on the Estates, stalkers also encounter the public and often have good opportunities to explain the activities of the DMG.

The DMG have set up a website [www.lochalshdmg.deer-management.co.uk](http://www.lochalshdmg.deer-management.co.uk) where it hopes to publish the DMP and any future versions/updates. The site will also be used to publish minutes from group meetings and any other relevant news that would be of public interest.

A copy of the draft DMP was published on the website in spring 2016 to allow for public comment prior to it being finalised. The only response received was from Trees for Life and this along with our response has been included under Appendix 12.

The DMG members will continue to have an open door policy for anyone who wishes to discuss any deer management matters within the group.

### 6.2.14 Action 14

#### *Actions to ensure deer welfare is taken fully into account at individual animal and population level*

All DMG members currently undertake annual summer counts/observations and also take part in the organised SNH winter count which they use to assist themselves with understanding the number of deer on the ground and the number of deer that need to be culled. DMG members will continue to undertake those observations to ensure that they are aware of how many deer are on the ground to ensure that deer welfare and their impact on the habitat can continue to be managed.

Larder weights will also continue to be recorded as that can assist in understanding the overall condition of the deer on any given year. Spring Mortality observations will be noted and discussed at DMG meetings with regards to potential effects on planned culls for that year.

All of the stalkers within the DMG are qualified to at least Deer Stalking Certificate Level 1 (DSC1) (Refer to section 3.2 for more details). DSC1 is a largely knowledge based qualification for Stalkers and managers which enables candidates to demonstrate their understanding of basic deer management principles and meat hygiene, and to show competence in shooting at simulated targets. It is a recognised industry standard and is supported by SNH.

Many of the senior Stalkers have also achieved Deer Stalking Certificate Level 2 (DSC2). DSC2 is a practically based qualification which enables candidates to demonstrate their knowledge and competence in legally, safely and humanely culling deer and dealing with carcasses hygienically.

Some of the senior Stalkers, who may be required to shoot deer under authorisations from SNH have also been approved by SNH as “Fit and Competent. *(Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) issues authorisations under the Deer (Scotland) Act 1996. Authorisations allow individuals to cull deer in circumstances when they would not normally have the legal right to shoot them, for example at night or to prevent deer damaging the natural heritage (natural habitats)).*

The DMG considers that all stalkers working within the group should have the DSC1 qualification as a minimum (or for new staff members be in training to achieve this qualification) to ensure that the welfare of the individual animal and population as a whole is protected. The DMG will also ensure that at least one stalker on each Estate will be DSC2 qualified and will encourage all stalkers to achieve this status as their career progresses.

Should other recommended qualifications/training courses with regards to welfare arise, these will be considered and if appropriate undertaken by the relevant stalkers/Estate managers.

DMG members will ensure that any new plans or activities such as new fenced woodland/regeneration areas take in to consideration the shelter and forage needs of the deer population to ensure their welfare is safeguarded.

DMG members will continue to use all data available to them such as habitat assessment information, deer counts, larder weights, land available for deer grazing etc to help ensure that deer welfare is fully taken into account during the management of the deer at both individual and total population level. If future information indicates that there is welfare issues, actions will be put in place to ensure those issues are resolved and those actions will be recorded at DMG meetings and in future DMP updates.

## 7.0 Conclusion

In 2013, the Scottish Government Rural Affairs Climate Change and Environment Committee (RACCE) undertook a review of Deer Management in Scotland. One of the recommendations of the Committee was that the deer sector should show that the voluntary basis of deer management should be 'fit for purpose' and it was recommended that this should be done by the end of 2016.

SNH and ADMG considered that 'Effective Deer Management Plans' for each Deer Management Group would be the best way to demonstrate this 'fit for purpose' recommendation and that those plans would be living plans that could evolve as management objectives changed over time.

In 2014, a Deer Management Group (DMG) Benchmark was designed and published by SNH and the Association of Deer Management Groups (ADMG) to help provide guidance to DMG's on how to assess and demonstrate its effectiveness in relation to the previously produced 'Code of Practice on Deer Management' within a deer management plan.

This Deer Management Plan for the Lochalsh Deer Management Group has addressed the actions outlined by those benchmark criteria. Sections 1 to 5 have provided general deer management related information on all the members of the group and section 6 has detailed how the group has achieved (or intends to achieve) the 14 Benchmark Criteria.

This will be an evolving plan which will be constantly monitored and regular updates provided to ensure information is kept current and relevant.