

Morvern DMG Meeting Minute, 6 April 2021

1. Apologies and those present:

Ian Collier (SF), Steve Fox (Carnoch), Neil Roberts (Laudale), Angus Robertson (Morvern Community Council), John MacDonald (KGL), Matt Wilson (Morvern Community Woodlands), Peter Lawson (Kinlochteacuis), Hugh Raven (Ardtomish), Lorraine Servant (NS), Ross Mackay (Ardtomish), Richard Cooke (ADMG), Derek Lewis (Drimnin), Susan Larson (Kingairloch), Andrew MacMaster (NS), Mark Foxwell (SWT). Harvey (Inversanda) joined late.

Apologies, John Jackson (FLS), Gareth Mills (Glensanda) and Iain Thomber.

2. Minutes of previous meetings – 3 November 2020 – and matters arising. No comments.

3. HIA update – Cathy Mayne doing Blanket Bog HIA in 2021; 90 plots, 30 in each of the 3 sub-groups.

4. Marine conservation update – HR.

Encroachment by illegal fishing in Sound of Mull in the last while. Some observed, reported to Marine Scotland but no action taken or interest shown. This area was originally highlighted as a marine/coastal National Park, supported by Argyll Council and continues to be a favoured area. Likely to arise again soon. May feature in the manifestos for the Scottish Parliament elections. Interest only likely to increase; could support a move to a fuller Land Management Strategy, beyond just deer.

5. Deer count & population model update.

Good count this year on foot. SL pulled this data together along with all other figures, which has been circulated to those covered by HIA to date. Corrections sought, then sent out to all. Many thanks to SL from PL.

Pop model – PL has spoken to RP about this. Aiming at 10/km² density, all need to be mindful of densities carried. Target stag culls sought going forwards to enable effective planning. Aiming to enable sporting landholdings to give a target cull which can then be modelled. Difficult with higher stag numbers elsewhere from reduced Ardtomish stag cull. If model can be stuck with, then it should allow lower hind numbers to be carried without negatively impacting sporting interests. Higher stag numbers now will potentially be mitigated by reduced hind numbers going forward.

Proposed stag culls:

SE SG	Ardtomish 23
	KGL S 20-25
	Glensanda 10-12
NE SG	Carnoch S 15
	KGL N 25-30
	Laudale E 17
	Inversanda/KML no response to date
NW SG	KLT/SWT 14
	Ardtomish W 7
	Laudale W 20
	NS Glencrip – no response
	Glencrip Estate – no response

Do not want to see a situation a few years from now where there are too few stags to service the sporting interests. Some figures may need to be adjusted going forward. Numbers currently stated would not be sustainable if the population model is accurate. PL to talk to RP re the model.

AMcM – positive to see the population model working with the sporting requirement and the HIA work.

MW – focus on winter mortality would be valuable. Helps identify small cohorts from high calf/yearling mortalities in poor winters. Wintering ground being lost to woodlands, so need to maintain that monitoring.

10 deer/km² queried by JMacD – John has done some mapping and suggests the SE group covers 15,000 ha and in latest count has c. 9 deer/km². NE SG sits at 12.4/km². PL – we now have the opportunity to get this population model to work and get the balance of numbers right, maintaining stag cull targets but at a slightly lower number overall than just now. RC – 10/km² is a global figure that is a max for RD on open hill in Scotland according to the DWG, which differs from NS publication just beforehand to 9.3, with a huge range. Should relate to individual groups and circumstances, including other herbivores (sheep, goats, hares, rabbits) allowing an overview. Need to demonstrate a rationale if density is to exceed 10 but that can be done.

Publication of data – how much are we willing to publish publicly? We could map all culls or we could produce numbers per SG. SF concerned about intimidation and abuse from daring to kill anything. HR – asked RC? RC suggests there is no reference in BP to specific cull information. RC's personal view is that it can create unpleasantness or abuse and people uninformed on deer ecology, may draw a false view. Therefore, publish summary figures on population basis (SG). For Drimnin – DL should there be an "all other" group? Would that cover all other properties? No count data from FLS but do have cull data, so can combine with Killundine and FLS. Footnote that there are not necessarily tight boundaries and not all the area is counted.

Check with FLS for publication of cull data and to ask for count data. **PL and CM to action.**

FLS data now provided:

Red – stag 108, hind 69, calf 32, Total 209. Roe buck – 15, doe 18, kid 8, total 41.

6. Members reports and discussion.

- a) Ardtomish. Condition of deer initially good, dropped off as expected. Hind cull ended early Jan. No poaching. Proposing 30 stags with existing E/W split. New woodland, just fencing set of 3 schemes 120 ha enclosed, plus one other piece of 30 ha of failed woodlands that will be replaced. Change in way that culls will be taken going forwards but not confirming anything just yet.
- b) Laudale. Hinds okay but dropped off after Xmas. Calves in poor condition later on. Some death still to come. 38kg av weight, av age 6. No new plantings, some restock of some areas, some woodland opening up near restock so no change in shelter. Glencrip, better condition, 42kg, 5 yr av. NS Glencrip, normal number, better condition 42kg. Laudale hope for 40 stags total (17 E, 23 W).
- c) KLT. 11H 5C. Condition dropped off after Xmas. Limited access due to COVID late Dec/early Jan. No woodland planned this season. No poaching. Talking about Peatland Restoration in conjunction with SWT but mindful that not supportable at the moment with the current deer numbers.
- d) Carnoch. Hinds in good condition at start, high calving, deterioration in condition but no particular concerns. No poaching, DVCs, reduction in shelter etc. Stags proposed 15 but happy to vary if reqd. 1300m deer fencing round in-bye and looking at some small woodland screens for power houses.
- e) KGL. 60 H 31 C (N 35/17, S 25/14). 1 S in enclosed woodland. 23 goats. 40kg, 5.5yr. Fecundity 57% but calf ratio was 2:1 M:F. Yeld hinds were okay, milk hinds drained from early on. Lots of hinds with calves at foot, lots of young hinds with calves. Hinds did not deteriorate further and hard to find shootable animals later in cull. No clients, good opportunity for selection.
- f) Oronsay (MW) not much to report. Visited to check property, no cull. Rhododendron work still planned.
- g) Killundine. 38 H 13 C. 38.5kg, 4.5 yr. Fecundity 70.8%. Hinds av with av to good calves. No poaching.
- h) Drimnin. 21 H 6 C. Av 41kg, av 5yr. Fecundity 84.5%, 1S to 2H calves culled. Wintered well through season. Calves av – good condition. No poaching. No clients, reduced venison price so culled to keep costs to minimum. Could make a good selection. Aiming to count this week. Active woodland plan waiting to go plus some additional planting, waiting for new timber road to be completed and breaches in plantations in Mungisdale.

- i) Inversanda. Harvey (joined late). Shot 2 stags with clients. Hinds 2 old ones, no weights. Left on the hill. Condition looked okay.
- j) SWT. 14H 4C. Good condition. No poaching.
- k) Fuinary. 108S 69H 32C plus roe.
- l) Glensanda. 0H. Condition okay but poor later.

SL – Glensanda only partially counted so figures for SE group are not accurate.

PL – counting is something we should do on an annual basis. A weakness.

JMacD – group could benefit more with better counts every 2 years. Small group of 8-10 who do this every time and have the expertise and knowledge. 2022, attempt to count properly across the whole area. All supportive.

7. Agency updates

- a) NS. LS/AMacM. Disposal of GlenCrip. Interest from community not shown as formal expressions of interest, so proposal disposal to RSPB going to Board in May. New cycle of SCM, nothing in Morvern 2021, but 2022 oakwoods and mixed woodland in Sunart planned (1 or 2 years). Rahoy Hills meeting this morning, LS not present but still got features in unfavourable condition. Andrew; positive response from MDMG. New woodland sought through Biodiversity Challenge Fund for habitat restoration. Very short time window for application. Hope that COVID challenges change for next season. Rhododendron eradication plan. Going to next stage with the LIFE project. Led by RSPB. Will aim to employ staff to deliver on the ground. If approved should be rolling out in the autumn.
- b) ADMG. RC updating on DWG. SG response published last week. Desk clearing before the election. Adopted most of the report's recommendations, but many only adopted in principle. Will depend on the next administration. New Bill likely in the next parliament and dependent on that government. Close season for stags – proposed loss and much debated. Did not accept recommendation to add to hind season, still being discussed. Density issue being adopted in principle but very much on a wide scale. The DWG report did not support need for DMGs as such, which ADMG does not agree with. MDMG shows why this is important. ADMG will attempt to influence next administration around continuing support for DMGs. Good to see some acknowledgement of work done by DMGs and the sector.

Talking about deer densities and impacts, need to acknowledge other herbivores, esp sheep. Other herbivores need to be taken into account. Climate Emergency is the over-riding Public Interest going forwards and DMGs have enormous potential to deliver these new targets for biodiversity and habitat improvements. Collaboration through DMG delivers public objectives at landholding scale.

Concerns that the cull would not be delivered during COVID, combining lack of clients and price of venison; however, impression is that there may be a shortfall but mostly being delivered on the open range. Most of the shortfall is in enclosed woodland on NFE. Credit to deer managers who have gone ahead and delivered their culls.

Venison market looked fragile but has stood up, but only just. Fyne Game is now only collecting for Highland Game. Significant price uplift not looking likely. Loss of hospitality sector (~50% of total venison market) has been devastating.

Social media images of late gestated grallochs of hinds not helpful for supporting venison market. Move away from lead ammunition is a requirement, since main customers cannot sell venison shot with lead (seen as poisonous). Copper well-proven at .270 and larger calibres. Satisfactory but need to change point of aim. FLS have used copper for some time now. Price differential is now also reducing. ADMG suggests switch within 12 months.

DMGs and land management plans. Some are already looking at describing themselves as Land Management Groups; maybe look to switch when updating DMPs.

PL – should we explore developing into a LMG, either to change into, or to run in parallel?

Round-robin email to send out to land managers, draft by DL, to look at this going forwards. **DL to action.**

Regional Land-use partnerships in the future could be a reason for developing something at the DMG scale and involving the local communities.

- c) SF. Ian Collier. Business as usual. Available for grant aid on private land. Future Woodlands Scotland – small organisation set up to encourage people to plant native woodlands, payment of agents for surveys, bridging loans and additional maintenance payments. Link to me for Minutes.
- d) Morvern Community Council. Nothing to add. Good to have some exchange.
- e) Rhododendron eradication programme. Above.

8. New cull record sheets update – SL

No response from Glensanda. Cull record sheets now in spreadsheet form. All happy to continue to use this. PL – sheet filling in was a moderate amount of work but the output in the report and maps makes that work very worthwhile. Bringing all that information together is really helpful.

9. Accounts update and proposed fee for 2020 and 2021. HR

Circulation not quite achieved – will be circulated in due course. HIA costs being shared on open range, as will RP population model costs. ADMG subs due for 3 years. **HR to action.**

10. AOB

- a) Muirburn – Use Muirburn Code, ensure adequate people and equipment to avoid uncontrolled fire and pre-notify to Fire and Rescue Services Dundee Control Centre 01382 835804. List of equipment being held to be compiled by Ross to send on to Fire and Rescue – please send a list of equipment held to Ross.
- b) Fyne Game – Gordon Slaughter is retiring and, with no purchaser for the business, will be closed with immediate effect from the end of April 2021. New game dealer needed.
- c) Susan Larson stated that she would stand down as Secretary at the autumn meeting (AGM).

Proposed date for the Autumn Meeting - Tuesday 2nd November 2021.

Update with notes from emails by PL.

FLS no population assessment this year.