

LDNS - what, why and for whom?



Richard Cooke
Acting Chairman,
Lowland Deer
Network Scotland

Everyone who has deer on their ground in Scotland, no matter how small or large their land holding, now has a responsibility for those deer and what they do. The Wildlife & Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011, which came into force in January this year, has placed this requirement on all with land with deer on it to manage those deer sustainably.

At a stroke, and whether deer were regarded as an asset or an inconvenience, it is now clear in law who is responsible for low ground deer, their impacts, their welfare, and any other effects of their presence.

The Lowland Deer Network Scotland (LDNS) is a newly formed organisation offering a more collaborative and co-ordinated approach to the management of wild deer on Scotland's low ground and on the urban fringe. It has been set up to help all deer managers to meet their new responsibilities – whether individuals or organisations, both public and private sector.

Low ground in this context includes farms, woodlands, forestry, local authority land, development land and derelict ground – in fact everything outside the main red deer range. It also includes urban and semi urban areas where people and deer, mainly roe, live in close proximity and where ownership and responsibility is very fragmented.

In some areas 'to do nothing' is a legitimate management option where deer densities are low and negative impacts are negligible, and this is the approach taken by a number of local authorities. But while some people may like to see and enjoy deer living nearby, deer also cause problems if in the wrong place or where their numbers are too great –

for instance road traffic accidents, damage to crops, trees or gardens. Poaching and other wildlife crimes such as coursing are also consequences of deer being present in numbers, and visible and accessible.

LDNS has been set up to help Scotland's low ground deer management practitioners (sportsmen, stalkers, rangers) who often work individually or in small groups.

Some landowners, and farmers particularly, delegate their deer management to these practitioners. Deer management groups also have an important role where there is an identifiable common interest and LDNS is keen to encourage the formation of more low ground groups based on existing models.

Organisations with an interest in deer management and deer welfare, including local authorities, should also consider joining LDNS. Many have been involved in its set up and are represented on its development committee, and the effectiveness of LDNS requires all relevant bodies, individuals and groups to work together to achieve results.

Photo: Scottish Natural Heritage.



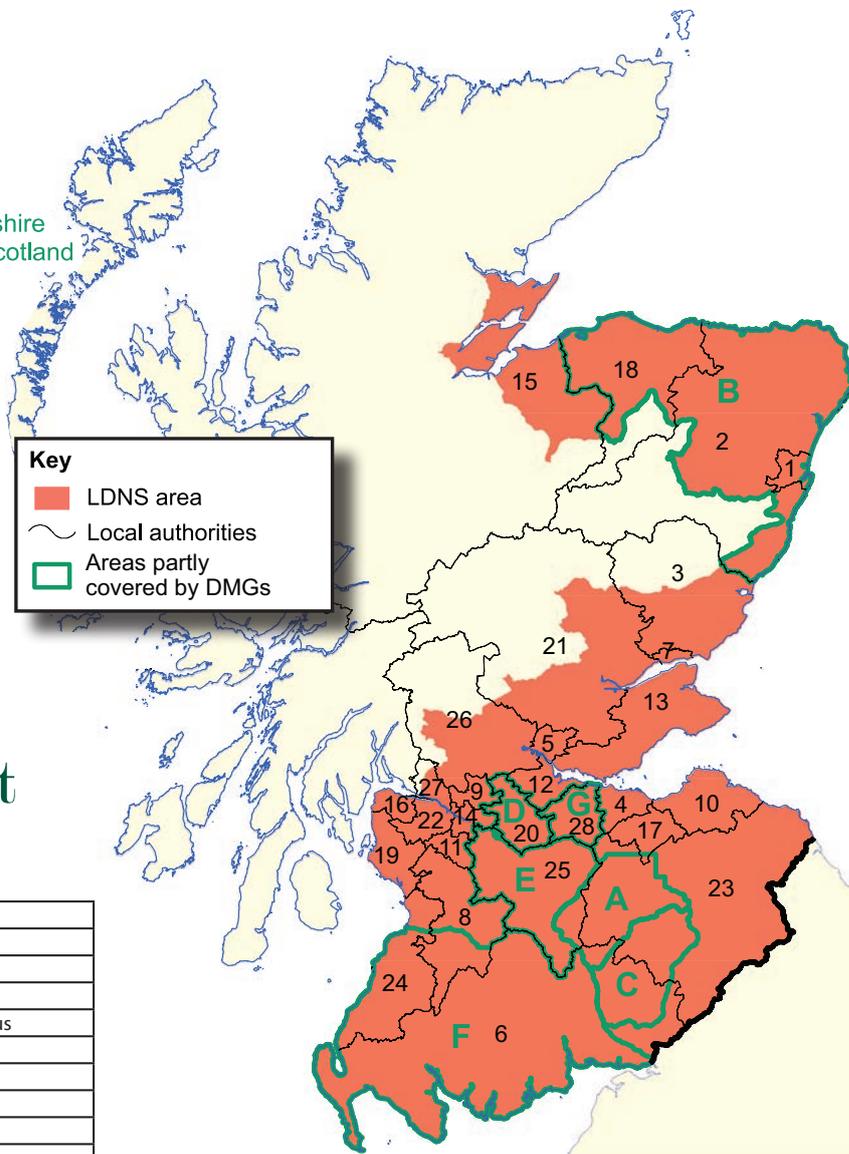
LDNS Area

Areas partly covered by DMGs

- A - Borders
- B - Buchan & District
- C - Eskdalemuir
- D - North Lanarkshire
- E - South Lanarkshire
- F - South West Scotland
- G - West Lothian

Local Authorities

- 1 - Aberdeen City
- 2 - Aberdeenshire
- 3 - Angus
- 4 - City of Edinburgh
- 5 - Clackmannanshire
- 6 - Dumfries & Galloway
- 7 - Dundee City
- 8 - East Ayrshire
- 9 - East Dunbartonshire
- 10 - East Lothian
- 11 - East Renfrewshire
- 12 - Falkirk
- 13 - Fife
- 14 - Glasgow City
- 15 - Highland
- 16 - Inverclyde
- 17 - Midlothian
- 18 - Moray
- 19 - North Ayrshire
- 20 - North Lanarkshire
- 21 - Perth & Kinross
- 22 - Renfrewshire
- 23 - Scottish Borders
- 24 - South Ayrshire
- 25 - South Lanarkshire
- 26 - Stirling
- 27 - West Dunbartonshire
- 28 - West Lothian



LDNS Development Committee

Richard Cooke	Acting Chairman
Richard Playfair	Acting Secretary
Jane Begg	West Lothian Council
John Bruce	British Deer Society
Alisdair Colyton	Farmer, stalking business, Angus
Angus Corby	Transport Scotland
Ian Fergusson	Forestry Commission Scotland
Mike Flynn	SSPCA
David Fyffe	Scottish Land & Estates
James Govan	Vocational stalker, Ayrshire
Jonathan Hall	NFUS Scotland
James Hammond	SNH Wildlife Management Officer, South Scotland
Glen Heggs	UPM Tilhill
Alex Hogg	Scottish Gamekeepers Association
Derek Kneller	North Lanarkshire DMG
Iain Laing	Fife Constabulary
Malcolm Muir	South Lanarkshire Council
Alex Paul	West Lothian DMG
David Quarrell	South Lanarkshire DMG
Robert Sharp	Vocational stalker, Renfrew
Ron Smith	Vocational stalker, Fife
Ian Talboys	Aberdeen City Council
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What does LDNS offer and how to join?

LDNS adds value by coordinating existing effort and representation and provides the basis for a collaborative approach. It can provide a single, strong voice if further legislation is brought forward, when consultation papers require a response, or the sector is faced with new European regulation.

LDNS is a source of information internally for members and externally to the wider public who want to see deer but know little about deer management. LDNS has an important role to play in public

education and in countering negative comment. Membership also provides representation to bodies including the Scottish Country Sports Tourism Group, the Scottish Venison Partnership and the Scottish Quality Wild Venison Assurance scheme.

LDNS provides a forum for increased contact and sharing including events to provide access to Best Practice advice, other training needs, and experience exchange.

Deer in and around towns

Peter Green

We think of deer on the hill and in the glen, in the field and forest, but increasingly we need to consider deer in the urban fringe and even in the city centre. We are familiar with the urban fox, confidently walking the city streets; experience south of The Border over the past fifteen or twenty years has shown that urban deer are likely to become a feature of our urban environment as well. In England the problem species are fallow, roe and muntjac. We do not [yet] have muntjac in Scotland and fallow are few and far between, but we do have roe in abundance and they are more and more obvious in the peri-urban fringes of our towns and cities. Have they invaded our habitat or have we invaded theirs? As we build out-of-town commercial parks with spacious, shrubby amenity verges and borders, is it any wonder that the deer that were originally there when the land was in earlier use are still there when the construction gangs move on. And as we farm our lowlands more intensively, can we blame the deer for moving into the town parks and landscaped areas, where no-one shoots at them and where both food and shelter are abundant.

Is this a problem? Surely we should look upon these new urban inhabitants as an asset? Doesn't everyone love to see a deer grazing in the evening sunlight? Well, yes, until the deer runs into the road, or causes a serious road accident, or eats the specimen plants in the nursery, or gets trapped within the school yard. Urban deer are both an asset and a nuisance. They may be urban, streetwise and tough, but they are still wild. They do not read traffic signs or use pedestrian crossings, which means that the report of a group of deer on the central reservation of an urban dual carriageway presents a real headache for the relevant authorities. It may be necessary to stop the traffic to clear the deer off – but where will they go and when will they appear again? They are notorious for getting stuck in railings, entangled in wire fencing or trapped under low gates. And although they happily graze alongside speeding traffic and on noisy building sites, they panic and take flight at any attempt to move them quietly or round them up. This leads to damage to property and injury to the deer. Roe deer in particular are experts at getting themselves into areas with very restricted exits and then failing to find their way out. Industrial yards with one entrance and exit, tennis courts with one door, even gardens with a high fence and only one footgate.

Roe regularly find their way in and then fail to find the same way out, even if the gates are left open and the deer left alone for days. More often than not, once discovered the deer retreat into one corner and cannot be persuaded to go anywhere near the exit. The result is suffering for the deer and great inconvenience for the property owner.



Photo: Scottish Natural Heritage.

In some circumstances the only option is to remove them, but that is much easier said than done. Dart guns are inaccurate and impracticable; a darted deer may run for a mile before it falls asleep. Nets are possible but teams of experienced people are needed. Deer will not eat food laced with sedatives, even when they are starving. Firearms are frequently unusable because of public safety. Deer in urban parks suffer high levels of dog attack, organised poaching and opportunist killings, but as the deer are increasingly animals that are born in these environments, they have no innate sense that they must head back out of the city to more rural habitats.

The fact is that there are no easy answers to deer in and around towns. Local Authorities, park managers, highway and road planners must expect the appearance of urban deer and face up to responsibilities in both predicting and managing the deer when they arrive. This may mean more sensible plantings, fencing or traffic management. It may mean accepting that deer management by way of culling will be as necessary on the edge of the town as on the shores of the loch. One thing is certain: urban deer are here and cannot be ignored.

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Managing deer in urban and semi-urban areas - advice to deer managers

David Quarrell

Chairman, South Lanarkshire Deer Management Group

Remember two valuable acronyms - *L.A.D* and *P.O.M*

L.A.D

Look around the area, thoroughly check the ground and the deer population on and around it.

Assess the situation regarding the public and the best approaches to avoid unnecessary contact and consequent problems with them.

Decide exactly what your cull plan is and how it can best be achieved with a minimum of disturbance to (and interest from) the public in the area.

You only need to contact those people who will be directly affected by your presence on the ground.

Photo: Forestry Commission Scotland



Call the landowner well in advance (a day or two) to let them know when you will be on their land. A call either late at night or very early in the morning just before you set out does not give sufficient notice.

Most, but not all, police stations in urban areas are manned 24/7. The Police prefer contact with them before and on arrival at the ground. If by chance the station is not manned, or you cannot get through, it's best to contact the main police switchboard and ask for the Assistance Desk - not as personal but still serves the purpose. You should tell the Police who you are, what you will be doing (ie managing deer), where you will be working, your start time and your estimated time of finish. It is useful to keep your Police contact numbers in your phone.

The Police will want your number so they can reach you if they need to, so make sure your phone can receive number-withheld calls.

Even if there are shift changes, your details remain 'live' on an incident screen until it is officially closed. It's also helpful to visit the local Police station and introduce yourself to the desk officers. You should show them a copy of your certificates, your letter of permission and give them an idea of your deer management plans. This should also be done by any DMG that is managing a particular area, and allows the Police to relay this information accurately to members of the public should they inquire as to what is happening.

When culling in a built up area, it is best to take just one animal per visit according to the season. If the cull is to be high then more visits are preferable than shooting several animals on a single outing and bringing unwanted attention to what you are doing. The first priority is to cull any sick or injured animals before the rest of the cull. An exception may be in the doe season when dependent young should be culled before the mature does in line with Best Practice, as this will limit any chance of a welfare issue.

If the plan is to reduce significantly the number of animals on the ground the adult does should be culled first as yearling does will not drop fawns until the following year, whereas mature does will.

P.O.M

Prepare in advance and have everything you need at hand to avoid unnecessary time at your vehicle or return trips to it. Some deer managers use signs to advise the public that stalking is taking place. In urban areas this can, in our experience, have a negative effect and encourage the public, particularly youngsters, to try and find you. Use of a sound moderator will reduce the chance of the public being alarmed by your management activity.

Observe all around the area where you are parked and make sure you are not drawing unnecessary attention to yourself while you get ready. Assess also what that area will be like at your finish time. You should never leave anything on view in the vehicle that might indicate that shooting is taking place or that there might be shooting equipment inside.

Move only when completely organised. Where you need to cross a road or cut through a built up area, make sure that your rifle is completely covered. Move into the area of your stalk away from the public and prepare yourself there, unslip the rifle and load it, putting the safety catch on. Shoulder the rifle, barrel upwards.

Safety at all times

When managing deer in an urban environment it is important to take into account members of the public who might be in the area or those who might be able to see what you are doing, even from their windows. This is especially the case when winter stalking, trees are bare, daylight hours are very short and can coincide with times of high public movement, but cull targets still need to be met.

Once the deer are located, recce the immediate area. Make sure any actions you take will not alarm any member of the public. There may be instances when someone is in the vicinity but well away from the area in which you are shooting. Even though they might be behind you or out of your direct vision, the shot, which may be safe enough, is not advisable.

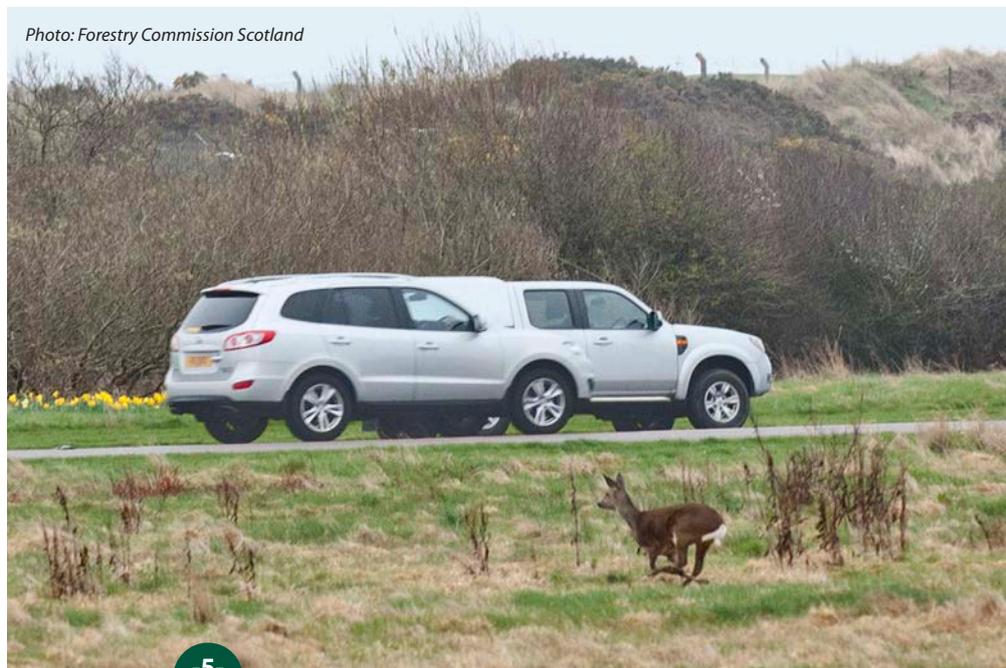
Err on the side of caution. Hold back until any members of the public have moved away, and if that does not happen call off your stalk. Members of the public can be especially

sensitive to this activity. Culling is an emotive issue with repercussions that can hinder the job either on the day or afterwards through the media, through concern or complaints. All deer managers in areas where there is a likely public presence must be aware of this and be patient.

This is an edited extract from Controlling Urban Deer 2012 by David Quarrell, South Lanarkshire Deer Management Group www.sldg.co.uk and is reproduced with permission of the author.



Photo: Forestry Commission Scotland



Deer management on the farm

Jonathan Hall

Director Policy and Regions, NFU Scotland

A dawn to dusk lifestyle working the land means that the vast majority of farmers will know when deer are present on some part of the farm where the combination of food, shelter and security make it an attractive habitat.

The way each of us regards the presence of deer on our land varies enormously ranging from a pest to be eradicated, to indifference, to appreciation of a native mammal which is both an asset and pleasure to see in a farmland environment.

The decoupling of agricultural support from production, cross-compliance and land management contracts, all with increased emphasis on protecting and enhancing the environment, and other natural resources such as biodiversity, water and soils, will serve to improve the suitability and availability of land for deer to colonise.

The changing distribution of wild deer across Scotland over the past century demonstrates their inherent ability to respond rapidly to any change in land management practice, something which is already evident with increased sightings in the more fertile lowlands and even into the centre of our busiest cities.

When you consider that agriculture accounts for almost 80 per cent of the land area of Scotland, the significance for the future of wild deer, their management and their impacts, is self evident.

Since our wild deer have no natural predators except man, it is generally accepted that they have to be managed for a variety of reasons - maintaining the health of the deer population, minimising any negative impacts on the farming business, minimising the incidence of deer vehicle collisions (DVCs), and minimising the incidences of poaching, coursing and wildlife crime.

Many farmers either don't have the inclination or time to get involved in the actual business of culling the deer on their land and they usually 'contract' in the services of a local vocational stalker who they trust to manage the deer humanely and safely to support the farm's management objectives.

Wild deer don't recognise property boundaries and management without consideration of and cooperation with neighbours can bring its own difficulties and limit what can be achieved. A joined up, collaborative approach to deer management will undoubtedly deliver a better outcome for deer, landholders and the local community as a whole. The Code of Deer Management, an adjunct to the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) 2011 Act (WANE) outlines the duty of everyone who has deer on their land to manage them sustainably.

Across central Scotland, parts of the Borders and Banff and Buchan there are low ground deer management groups where collaborative effort is far more effective than individuals acting in isolation.

The West Lothian Deer Management Group (WLDMG) for example is one of three Groups within the central belt of Scotland all of which offer a free professional deer management service for local

landholders including farmers. The membership of the WLDMG is made up of local stalkers who have achieved Deer Stalking Certificate level 2 and are fully insured for public liability (£10m). Central to the aims of the WLDMG are deer welfare and management incorporating the highest levels of safety, qualified professionalism and continual impact assessment of their services.

Photo: Neil McIntyre



Changes to the provisions to shoot deer in the close season and at night as a result of the Wildlife and Natural Environment (WANE) Act 2011.

Jamie Hammond

Scottish Natural Heritage

The WANE Act has made a number of significant changes to the Deer (Scotland) Act 1996.

Changes to Sections 5 and 26 of the Deer Act, which cover the close seasons and owners' and occupiers' rights, mean that from 1 April 2012 any deer culled out of season can only be culled under authorisation from SNH.

The exemption for owners and occupiers to cull deer out of season to prevent damage to improved agricultural ground and enclosed woodland has been removed.

The right for the occupier to cull deer to prevent damage in season in enclosed woodland and on improved agricultural land remains.

SNH can now issue authorisations that can be general or specific in their nature. SNH has issued a general authorisation covering the period 1 April 2012 – 31 March 2013 (available at <http://www.snh.gov.uk/protecting-scotlands-nature/species-licensing/deer/authorisations/>) to owners and occupiers to cull deer for the purpose of preventing damage to improved agricultural land and enclosed woodland. This general authorisation will cover the period from 1 April 2012 to 31 March 2013. The general authorisation will not allow the culling of female deer of any species from the 1 April to the 31 August.

The owner, owner's employees, the occupier's employees or any other person

normally resident on the land can carry out control under this general authorisation in enclosed woodland and on improved agricultural land without the need to be on the SNH Fit and Competent register. Anyone who does not fall into the classes of person above must be on the SNH Fit and Competent register.

The general authorisation is available to download from the SNH website, with paper copies available from SNH on request. Those operating under a general authorisation must have read and understood the general authorisation and carry out any control in accordance with the conditions on the authorisation. Returns of deer culled under the general authorisation will be sought from agricultural census forms and annual cull returns.

The general authorisation provisions will be subject to regular review and it is likely that SNH will review the conditions and information required to be provided to operate under the general authorisation on an annual basis.

The culling of any female deer during the period of 1 April to 31 August will require a specific authorisation for the property to be issued by SNH. Individuals suffering damage to their interests should apply to SNH for an authorisation using the application form which is available on the SNH website. SNH will assess applications, which may include conducting site visits, and ensure where an authorisation is required that appropriate mitigation of welfare issues is adopted.

As with all authorisations, only individuals suffering damage to their interests on a property will have the right to operate control themselves or contract others to undertake control on their behalf.

Night shooting for public safety may now be authorised by SNH. This relates to the culling of deer to reduce or prevent impacts by deer on public safety and, as with other authorisations, SNH will require information supporting the need for such an authorisation. This is not a measure to allow shooting of deer at night where it is deemed unsafe to do so during daylight hours.

All authorisations issued by SNH include a series of conditions that must be complied with and failure to do so may lead to withdrawal of the authorisation.

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Competence - Setting the Bar

Colin McClean

*ADMG representative to the Deer Sector
Competence Working Group*

The Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (2011) has challenged the deer sector to significantly increase uptake of deer stalking qualifications. This follows representation at all levels during the consultation process that a voluntary system developed by the sector for the sector would be the best approach. The then Minister's position was that anyone intending to shoot deer should be competent to do so, or be in the close company of somebody with that proven competence.

In response to this, a Deer Sector Competence Working Group was established and, following extensive deliberations and a study of the available options, this working group has agreed that the existing National Occupational Standard (NOS) and the existing current Deer Stalking Certificate 1 or equivalent qualifications would be valid demonstrations of competence in terms of the Act.

This voluntary, sector-led approach will be subject to a review by SNH in 2014 and, if uptake of it is viewed as unsatisfactory, Government may then revert to imposing a statutory system to its own standards and competence levels.

It is important therefore that all who intend to shoot deer now should be able to demonstrate competence at least to this level, and with aspirations to achieve a higher standard if they wish.

In responding to an update on progress by the Group, Stewart Stevenson, Minister for Environment and Climate Change, wrote:

"I recognise that in opting for this level of qualification, and requiring a simulated safety stalk rather than a witnessed stalk, you are seeking to strike a balance between increasing standards and controlling costs. I also believe an important aspect here is to encourage the broadest possible uptake of this training. The Group's decision will make it possible to increase training capacity quickly, in order to cope with any significant increase in demand, and so ensure that it is possible to train a substantial number of candidates in a short period of time.

"Clearly you are setting a minimum standard, which is not intended to limit stalkers, who will be free to take up further training if they so wish. I also recognise that this issue, including the practical element, is something the deer sector may wish to revisit in time."

Richard Cooke, LDNS Acting Chairman, commented:

"The Group has purposely kept this process as simple as possible whilst recognising that demonstrable uptake of this minimum standard must be achieved. In short the message is that if you wish to shoot deer unsupervised in Scotland for sport, to protect a forest or nature reserve, or to protect crops on a croft or a farm, then competence affects you, you cannot duck this issue, and you should look to achieving the standard that has been set down by the Group.

"The deer sector has until 2014 to increase uptake of deer stalking qualifications significantly. If we cannot do that, we risk a compulsory test being imposed by Government.

"To demonstrate competence to the required level is simple, and if this applies to you then you should contact one of the appropriate training organisations such as BASC Scotland (www.basc.org.uk) or BDS (www.bds.org.uk) to take this forward."