Meeting of Lowland Deer Network Scotland Executive Committee

At: The Royal Hotel, Bridge of Allan
On: Tuesday 25 February 2014

Present:
Richard Cooke (RC), Chairman
Ron Smith (RS), Vice Chairman
Dick Playfair (DP), Secretary
Ian Fergusson (IF), Forest Enterprise
Gordon Patterson (GP), FCS
Jamie Hammond (JH), SNH
Anton Watson (AW), SNH
Ian Talboys (IT), Aberdeen City Council
Alex Paul (AP), WLDMG
Peter Semple (PS), Inverclyde and Dunbartonshire DMG
John Bruce (JB), BDS
David Fyffe (DFy), Scottish Land & Estates
Iain Laing (IL) Police Scotland
Andy Mavin (AM) Police Scotland
Glenn Heggs (GH), SW Scotland DMG/UPM
James Govan (JG) Stalker, Ayrshire

Apologies or not present:
Derek Kneller (DK) NLDMG
Angus Corby (ACor), Transport Scotland
Daye Tucker (DT) NFUS
Kenny Willmitt (KW), BASC Scotland
Jane Begg (JBg), West Lothian Council
Malcolm Muir (MM), South Lanarkshire Council, COSLA
Alex Hogg (AH), SGA
Rob Sharp (RSh)
George Ritchie (GR), Banff & Buchan DMG
Mike Flynn (MF), SSPCA

		Action
1	**Previous minutes and matters arising** 1.1 IT asked for *Aberdeen* to be changed to *Aberdeenshire* in minutes (action point 6.11) 1.2 <u>Humane dispatch of deer at roadside</u> 1.2.1 Concern had been raised about pursuing a proforma for dealing with deer at RTA. To be discussed further. JB said that there was already an existing protocol that worked in England and a Lantra approved course providing a certificate of attendance (not competence). 1.2.2 AM said Scotland had a standing procedure. RC asked for a small sub-group to convene to agree what if anything should be done next comprising AM, DK, IT, KW, JH and AC with JB to coordinate.	DP JB

	1.2.3 Suggestion for improved awareness was to add phone number or web address to deer warning road signs. 1.2.4 AP said the issue was not new, but the system required some streamlining, and that there had been different approaches across different Police divisions that now needed to be standardized. 1.3 <u>Start up conference costs</u> Clarified with FC who had acted as banker for the event so no contribution recorded. 1.4 <u>COSLA conference</u> DP to discuss with MM re next event and whether LDNS might have a presence. 1.5 <u>Fife DMG</u> RS said that a Fife candidate DMG was in progress with intention for a Spring meeting. RS said that this was unlikely to result in a DMG as such, but more likely an Association of common interest. 1.6 <u>Buccleuch Estate</u> RC/DP to follow up. 1.7 <u>PACEC</u> 1.7.1 RC reported that a supplementary study was being commissioned by ADMG and LDNS under a separate contract looking at the deer sector as a whole and not just sporting. The draft questionnaire was virtually agreed and respective organisations would be asked to circulate. 1.7.2 GP asked for advance sight of the questionnaire and suggested it should be put round the committee for comment. RC said he saw no reason why questionnaire and explanatory notes could not be circulated.	DP RS RC
2	**AGM Review** RC said that he had been encouraged by the AGM with attendance twice that of the previous year, with good feedback.	
3	**Financial** 3.1 RC said that a new income and expenditure statement had not been produced as that from the AGM was largely unchanged, but that one would be produced for financial year end. 3.2 DP had produced an outline budget for 2014/15 that showed a deficit of £720 and spend of all income and any brought forward funds.	RC

	3.3 RC said that the option for LDNS to 'bank' with one of the agencies that could recover VAT was worth serious consideration. Just over £6000 of income was being lost in irrecoverable VAT.	JH
4	**RACCE Committee inquiry** 4.1 RC said he did not think there was an appetite to change the deer legislation at present following the RACCE inquiry. 4.2 RC said that the low ground was far less in the public eye in terms of deer management issues albeit its task was arguably greater, as less coordinated, more to do, more people to reach. It was a case of building contacts and awareness. The RACCE inquiry had been helpful at raising awareness of low ground issues at a political level. 4.3 RC said that if low ground deer groups follow the deer code and apply Best Practice they will be doing all they can reasonably do under the current system. 4.4 JH said SNH was working hard to see how it could work better with DMGs from SW Scotland to Sutherland, particularly in terms of defining and delivering the public interest with all its regional variations. 4.5 RC asked whether it would be possible to produce a model/generic deer management plan or more likely a policy 'statement' for a low ground DMG taking into account issues such as welfare and improving the deer population, protecting crops, managing deer close to people, and delivering public benefit. JH said that a simple format could incorporate a tick-box element linking back to Best Practice, the Deer Code and WDNA. 4.6 JB said that a blueprint for a coherent low ground DMG could be developed showing shared responsibilities, population modeling and planning. He said that if an annual target was missed by just 10 per cent this could result in a doubling of the roe deer population within 3 years. 4.7 RC said that the strength of low ground groups was that people (but not always land owners) were interested in collecting and sharing information; they were motivated, but not overly bureaucratic. 4.8 AP suggested that a DMG constitution could do more in providing a statement for local deer management planning.	

	4.9 GP said that reference to public benefit/interest should be included – DVCs, woodland impact, impacts on designated sites, and this could identify the most important areas to direct effort. 4.10 RC said the situation was not helped by not having to have a deer management plan for forestry areas of < 50 ha, and that deer habitat, particularly where large contiguous blocks of such scale were planted, created deer habitat without any need for a DMP and that a change to the rules was required. Submission to be made to current SRDP consultation in this respect. 4.11 JH said that he was keen to see SNH consulted for areas of planting of < 50 ha. GP said he thought that SRDP funding should support production of DMPs in these instances. GP also said that reporting needed to be written in as part of the process. 4.12 JB said he had concerns about issues of transparency that had come out of RACCE Committee discussions and that Groups still needed to be able to have confidential discussions. In order to see formation of new Groups any blueprint would need to be "adoptable and not dictatorial". 4.13 AP said that sharing constitutions had helped the formation of WLDMG, and had brought to the fore issues such as public safety and public image. 4.14 RC asked low ground DMG representatives to send copies of their respective constitutions to him if able to do so within the terms of reference of their Groups. 4.15 PS said that the I&DDMG had adopted the NLDMG constitution. 4.16 JH said that it was important that a constitution laid out the DMG's function, planning and the public interest in its own particular low ground context. 4.17 JB said that in his view LDNS should create a simple low ground DMG constitution as a joint project with SNH, bearing in mind that it was not always the owner responsible for deer management and there would need to be a requirement to be flexible. R wil ldiscuss with snh ls 4.18 DF said that he had concerns about how progress would be reviewed when, in his view, there was very little baseline information in existence on which progress could be judged.	RC, DP AP, DQ, DK, GR

	4.19 RC said that Ministerial insistence on the submission of a cull return would be a start. This could be supplemented by a short questionnaire to achieve some baseline data. 4.20 GP said that baseline data did exist on the status of the environment and what needs to be protected, where impacts are etc and that the most important areas could be taken from the Native Woodlands Study. Possibly this information could be used in conjunction/overlay with other information such as RTAs.	
5	**LDNS Project Plan** 5.1 JH said that AW is working up a single Project Plan document that will link through to the LDNS budget, deliverables for financial year 2014/15, looks forward to the future, and tie in with SNH work across other areas. 5.2 JH said that despite LDNS budget cuts, LDNS work and funding was seen as a priority and that a commitment would be sought for the next financial year and two further years after that. 5.3 JH said that the Project Plan could build on existing data (as mentioned above), mapping areas of deer impacts across lowlands, delivering favourable condition on designated sites, taking into account DVC hotspots and also reported incidents of deer-related wildlife crime. 5.4 A number of key 'priority' areas would be identified: Abdrdeenshire, Angus, Fife, Lothians, South Lanarkshire, Glasgow with impacts mapped, identified by local authority area and prioritized. 5.5 JH said that more land owners and land managers needed to be involved in the collection of data to support the case for deer management. 5.6 RC said that other herbivore impacts, and not just deer, should be considered. 5.7 Agreed there should be presentations on way forward at next meeting by JH on existing data and its use, and GP on the FCS Native Woods Survey and implications. 5.8 DF asked that, despite the DIAT event for Local Authorities being held back until 2015, presumably casework with Local Authorities was ongoing and that he was meeting John Davidson of Aberdeenshire Council imminently.	AW JH

	5.9 GP said that designated sites in the lowlands should not be overlooked and that a woodland response task group was being assembled. RC said that he was keen to have a LDNS representative on the LINK Deer Task Force, with SWT or another NGO representing LINK on LDNS. 5.10 RC said that better interface with private forestry companies was required. GH agreed to speak to Scottish Woodlands. RC said that he was pursuing CONFor. GP supported this and said that he also would approach Stuart Goodall/ Jamie Farquhar of CONFor. 5.11 It was agreed that attendance at local NFUS meetings where possible should be prioritised. 5.12 AP raised dubiety of DVC information for the A7, where there appeared to be no uniform way of recording incidents, and estimated that collisions were under-reported by a factor of 3 – 4. Often just 'animal' recorded . Thought that SSPCA data might be more useful but agreed there would be some under-reporting but also double counting. 5.13 Agreed that there were anomalies with regard to DVCs both over protocol for humane dispatch and data collection/data purity. LDNS DVC sub-group (see 1.3) to take on board. Agreed that Mike Flynn should be contacted to join this sub-group. 5.14 IF said that there had been a 'recording road kill' project. JB said that had been a useful exercise in sampling roadkill for TSEs but this had been discontinued due to cost.	JH, GP DT GH RC, GP JB
6	**Planned events** • DP said that the following would be scheduled as planned events through 2014: • Borders Stalking Fair • Urban Deer Day – East Kilbride • NLDMG DSC 1 day with WLDMG at Harburn • Deer on Your Doorstep pilot project • GWCT Scottish Game Fair Plus • Encouraging more DMG formation and local initiatives • Engagement with Local Authorities on 1 to 1 basis • NFUS meetings • Schools events (with SNH/RHET) budget permitting.	

7	**Summer Newsletter** The following were discussed as possible topics: • Deer dogs (George Ritchie) • Native Woods impacts – low ground (GP) • Scottish Deer Project - Royal (Dick) Vet School • What the Deer Code Means for a Local Authority (MM, South Lanarkshire or IT, Aberdeen City Council) • Deer browsing impacts and grant recovery. DP to follow up with those above	GR GP James Simpson MM, IT IF
8	**Local and national deer issues** 8.1 <u>WLDMG (AP)</u> 8.1.1 AP raised the instance of a 'hobby forester' who needed a deer manager, where he should go to find one, and how. 8.1.2 Discussion followed about status of the 'Fit & Competent' register. JH said that very few enquiries were received (between 0 and 3 per year). AP wondered whether the Register should not be advertised and give it more prominence. 8.1.3 JB said that making specific recommendation was difficult. 8.1.4 RC asked whether LDNS should carry a contact list on its website for advice. 8.1.5 PS said that the most obvious route would be to put an enquirer in touch with their local DMG and not an individual, and the F & C register could be used as fallback. RC said that the F & C register was not publicly available so any enquiry would need to be made to SNH. 8.2 <u>Wildlife crime and poaching</u> 8.2.1 AP said that Hopetoun was being hit quite badly by poaching, and that information was being collected such as details of vehicles and activity stepped up. 8.2.2 IL gave reminder that the Fife Police Wildlife Crime seminar was taking place on 25 March. 8.3 <u>SW Scotland (GH)</u> 8.3.1 GH said that BDS Scotland would be holding a butchery demonstration on 1 May and that local butchers would be encouraged to attend. 8.3.2 JB said that BDS was generally very active, and welcoming to non-members, with a wide range of events and courses.	

	8.4 SL&E DP asked whether low ground deer management could form the basis of a SL&E demonstration day. DF said that there were a number of less formal farm 'walk and talk' events and this could fall into that category. DF to follow up. 8.5 Aberdeen (IT) IT said that a blueprint for an event that could be used in different locations would be helpful, and that where such events involved a number of participating organisations (such as the Police, SSPCA etc for example) they could appear as less controversial. 8.6 CWD JB gave a short update, and said that the information was now disseminating down through networks in Europe. Also, everyone needed to make sure that travel agents were aware and that it was mentioned to guests without causing upset or turn off.	DF
9.	**Next meeting** Thursday 24 April, 10.00 for 10.30am at the Royal Hotel, Bridge of Allan.	All