

## JURA DEER MANAGEMENT GROUP

Minute of the meeting of Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> November 2023 in the Antlers, Craighouse.

**Present:** John Lithgow (Chairperson) - Inver Estate, William MacDonald - Ardfin Estate, Andrew Fletcher - Ardlussa Estate, Ewan MacInnes - Ardlussa Estate, Rob Fletcher - Barnhill Estate, Craig Rozga - Ruantallain Estate, Gordon Muir – Tarbert Estate, Scott Muir-Tarbert Estate, Kyle MacDonald – Tarbert Estate, Graham Hayes- Inver Estate, Ross Rozga - Forest Estate, Guy Morley – Ruantallain Estate, Donald Ewen Darroch (Secretary), David Holland- Ardfin Estate, Nathan Berrie of Nature Scot. By video link, Jamie Fletcher-Barnhill Estate and Lord Astor-Tarbert Estate.

**Welcome:** The chair welcomed everyone.

**Apologies:** Lindsay Bury -Ruantallain Estate, Rowan Lattimer- Ardlussa Estate.

### **Minutes of 17<sup>th</sup> May 2023:**

These had been circulated previously by email and were deemed as accepted.

### **Nature Scot and Government Policy Update:**

Nathan Berrie took questions from the group predominantly about, the Scottish governments policy on the ten deer per square kilometre density. He clarified the 10-kilometre density is not a legal requirement, but it was highly likely that anyone applying for public funding for any management purposes would be unable to get grant aid with a high density. It is unclear if in the future there maybe grant aid to assist with achieving the ten animals per square kilometre.

Reducing the island herd from the present 14 animals per kilometre to 10 would be a very significant change management wise. The group questioned how this may affect employment, financial income, if there would be any environmental benefit. Although there are small areas where tree cover may reestablish, much of Jura is Molinia grass and it is hard to see reducing numbers would improve that. It was also pointed out that reducing numbers drastically would probably mean deer concentrating more on good grazing and sheltered areas so defeating the purpose of a reduction as these would just become overgrazed. There was general comment that the management, control of the deer herd on Jura might suffer because of deer management issues elsewhere in Scotland. Nathan acknowledged that the island was known for its superior quality animals, low winter mortality and good fecundity, which all go to show a healthy population within the island environment. Nathan agreed that due to the number of goats on the island they should be included as part of the island plan. The group will have to make a valid case for any density over the expected 10 per sq./km. It was suggested that the group should feed into the Scottish's Governments present biodiversity recommendation.

He concluded that there will be an expectation from Nature Scot and the Scottish Government that there will be a move to some form of reduction in density overall.

### **Deer Management Plan Information Paper:**

Plan to be updated next year. The secretary to gather carcass weights to feed into the plan. Also population monitoring to be considered. Before the next meeting check who can update the plan and expected cost.

### **Deer Management Plan Group Operation Paper:**

Plan to be updated next year.

**Estate Reports:**

- a. Stag Cull Numbers. To date there is a total cull 263. This is slightly down on last year due to difficult stalking conditions because of inclement weather.
- b. Proposed hind cull. Subject to weather conditions four of the estates are aiming to slightly increase the cull.
- c. Observed deer health. The general comment was that the stags had held their condition well into the rut. Several stags with pin teeth shot. There had been a single sighting of a Sika stag on the road at Ardfin.
- d. Deer Vehicle Collisions. Two reported since the last meeting.
- e. Out of season authorisations. None.

**Habitat Monitoring:**

No plots surveyed this year. Await a response from Nature Scot about changes to the survey data which would be more suited to Jura.

**Training:**

No further courses known of at this time.

**DMG Website:**

Each estate to check that the contact details on the web site are still correct.

**Finance & Division of Costs:**

Inver Estate are covering the low cost of the web site. No further costs currently.

**Any Other Business:**

Venison. The price has increased slightly since the start of the season but is still low. Some owners feel that more effort needs to be put into finding another dealer as anecdotally some estates elsewhere have been getting higher prices than that offered to Jura.

**Date of Next Meeting:**

Date to be agreed for May 2024.

The Chair thanked members for attending and closed the meeting.