

# JURA DEER MANAGEMENT GROUP

Minute of the meeting of Monday 17<sup>th</sup> November 2025 in Forest Lodge.

**Present:** John Lithgow (Chairperson) - Inver Estate, Ross Rozga - Forest Estate, Scott Muir-Tarbert Estate, Kyle MacDonald – Tarbert Estate, Andrew Fletcher - Ardlussa Estate, Ewen MacInnes - Ardlussa Estate, Tom Baxter-Ardlussa Estate, Rob Fletcher – Barnhill Estate, Craig Rozga - Ruantallain Estate, Martin Young-Ardfin Estate and Donald Ewen Darroch (Secretary). Also in attendance Nathan Berrie of NatureScot, Andrew McCallum- Wild Jura Ltd and Cllr McFadzean. By video link, Alexander George- Forest Estate, Euan Ross- Highland Game Ltd and Cllr Redman.

**Welcome:** The chair welcomed everyone.

**Apologies:** William MacDonald - Ardfin Estate, Jamie Fletcher-Barnhill Estate, Lord Astor-Tarbert Estate, Gordon Muir – Tarbert Estate, Lindsay Bury -Ruantallain Estate, Graham Hayes-Inver Estate, Guy Morlock- Ruantallain Estate.

## **Minutes of 19<sup>th</sup> May 2025:**

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

## **NatureScot and Government Policy Update:**

### **National updates**

Natural Environment Bill is currently going through parliament and is presently at Stage 2 with draft amendments to be debated shortly. Stage 3 is expected in early 2026. The Bill will include a new deer Act which will potentially include new ground for intervention or trigger for regulation based on nature restoration. It will also potentially include creation of new register of authorised persons which will be a requirement for anyone who wants to shoot deer unaccompanied in Scotland. It isn't clear yet what the minimum level of competence will be but NatureScot expects that there will be a basic level of qualification which stalkers will need to achieve. Also likely, we don't want to limit access, so NatureScot will likely seek to bring in a grace period for a number of years to allow those who are not qualified to complete the necessary training. The provisions for Deer Management Nature Restoration Orders (DMNROs) and changes to female seasons has been removed from the Bill. The above is subject to amendments and changes during debate.

UK government is banning use of lead ammunition; however, it is recognised that the market was already leading this change. Looking like the ban will be written into law by 2026 with a grace period for industry transition by 2029.

### **Local**

NatureScot recognises the efforts of the Group and based on the count data NatureScot notes the increased cull activity seems to be reversing the incremental increase in deer population. NatureScot encouraged the Group to maintain this level of effort and further welcomes the stated cull targets for 25/26 which are in line with the previous seasons increase that was around 900 deer with a higher focus on hinds.

### **Site Condition**

SSSI monitoring was completed this year, and a report is expected shortly. NatureScot recognise the challenges of woodland management on Jura and has welcomed the efforts from estates in the north to look at projects to improve woodland cover and the condition of the SSSI.

**Land Reform Bill.** The Bill has now passed through parliament, and it was generally noted that the group already make public the estate/deer management plans.

**Game Dealers/Venison sales:**

Euan Ross of Highland Game Ltd gave an overview of the overall venison market. Despite the slow growth in the market the wholesale price remains low. The constraint caused by high processing overheads, quality control and difficulty getting into the large mainstream markets. The present high beef prices do help with a consumer interest in venison but compared to beef, lamb, chicken and pork it is a very low volume product, so it is hard to make inroads into the larger supermarkets. There are high end retailers who are selling venison successfully, but these have limited capacity. Euan believes that the only way the wholesale price can increase, as the culls increase throughout the country is if there is more public procurement, such as schools and hospitals where venison fits well with a healthy meat product.

The new collection regime on Jura, of the lorry going up to Tarbert had improved the collection from the north estates greatly. Highland Game are in the process of developing an App which will allow estates to inform when they have carcasses for collection and the carrier to confirm when there would be an uplift. Nathan said that NatureScot in conjunction with game dealers were studying an App facility which would allow the stalker to the exact point of cull and as it develops, follow the carcass through to the point of processing.

Ewen MacInnes asked if there could be more clarity in what shot placement rendered a carcass as no use for human consumption. The estates feel it is sometimes not clear why a carcass has been condemned. There was a discussion on quality assurance schemes and how these were compatible or not with a wild product.

Andrew McCallum of Wild Jura Ltd said that they had been able to take about one sixth of the island cull, most of that from the north estates. The sale to schools was successful and they had product in many retailers in Jura and Islay. All the content in their burgers and sausages are organic which along with the type of packaging used is in line with the aim of being an environmentally sustainable business. The group wished Andy every success in their endeavours.

**Deer Management Plan Information Paper:**

There is an extended cost to the update and members had questioned if this was justified. The original plan has over-run and Nathan explained that it was expected that it be updated with the future deer herd expectations. Donald Ewen said that he would be willing to undertake the update for a nominal fee. It was agreed to liaise with NatureScot on how much detail was required for the new plan. To be agreed and the proposed plan ready for the next meeting.

**Deer Management Plan Group Operation Paper:**

As above.

**Estate Reports:**

- a. Stag cull. Barnhill 35, Ardlussa 57, Ruantallain 73, Tarbert 56, Forest 17, Inver 42, Ardfin 54.
- b. Hind cull proposed. Barnhill 40, Ardlussa 140, Ruantallain 120, Tarbert 100, Forest 12, Inver 50/60, Ardfin 110.
- c. Observed deer health. Stags were in good condition. Animals with pin teeth are still in noticeable numbers with approximately 50% of the Ruantallain cull showing the trait. General comment was that there seemed to be a lot of late calves, which would tie in with the suggested late rut last year. Also commented that this year's rut seemed rather lack lustre.
- d. Deer Vehicle Collisions. Nothing reported.

**Habitat Monitoring:**

HIA remains an area where NatureScot wishes to facilitate a framework, and Nathan will be seeking discussions with his team to develop a plan which is easily deliverable in house for each estate. Nathan aims to have a training session before the next meeting on the new grassland method. NatureScot notes that some estates already have HIA completed for other purposes and suggested this could be used, but it would need to be reviewed to determine whether it is an appropriate proxy. Inver have done an extensive environmental survey under a SGRPID scheme and Andrew commented that other agricultural groups were looking at suitable habitat schemes for Jura.

**Training**

A DSC Level 2 to be held early next year at the north end.

The Islay Natural History Trust will be doing some herbicide spray training, and a place might be available for Jura. Scott Muir said that he may be interested.

Nathan advised that there is a new industry, higher-level vocational qualification in deer management across the UK. The Deer Management Certificate Level 3 (DMC3) unifies all existing recognised training.

**DMG Website:**

To be updated as required.

**Finance & Division of Costs:**

None at present.

**Any Other Business:**

At the May meeting the possibility of a Mink (non-native species) eradication scheme had been discussed. Follow up with NatureScot to see if this may still be feasible in some form.

An Invasive Plant Project for Islay and Jura is being undertaken by the Islay Natural History Trust. The plants in question are Japanese Knotweed and Gunnera (Giant Rhubarb) which are mainly round the Small Isles Bay area. The group are supportive of the idea and wish to be kept informed.

**Date of Next Meeting:**

Date to be agreed for May 2026.

The Chair thanked members for attending and closed the meeting.