

JURA DEER MANAGEMENT GROUP

Minute of the meeting of Monday 19th May 2026 at Tarbert Lodge.

Present: John Lithgow (Chairperson) - Inver Estate, Lord Astor-Tarbert Estate, Ross Rozga - Forest Estate, Gordon Muir-Tarbert Estate, Kyle MacDonald – Tarbert Estate, Andrew Fletcher - Ardlussa Estate, Ewen MacInnes - Ardlussa Estate, -Ardlussa Estate, Rob Fletcher – Barnhill Estate, Craig Rozga - Ruantallain Estate, Guy Morlock- Ruantallain Estate, Tom Askew- Ruantallain Estate, Scott Muir – Ardfin Estate, Martin Young-Ardfin Estate, Graham Hayes- Inver Estate and Donald Ewen Darroch (Secretary). Also in attendance Nathan Berrie of NatureScot, James Hammond of NatureScot , Bruce Cooper of Highland Game Ltd, Pc Panting and Pc Tuohy of Police Scotland.

Welcome: The chair welcomed everyone.

Apologies: Jamie Fletcher-Barnhill Estate, Lindsay Bury -Ruantallain Estate, Andrew McCallum – Wild Jura Ltd, Cllr McFadzean, Cllr Redman, Craig Rozga-Ardmenish and Alexander George- Forest Estate,

Minutes of 17th November 2025:

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

Deer Management Plan Information Paper:

Since the November meeting Donald Ewen had been updating the plan in conjunction with the estates and NatureScot. The plan to run to 2031. Donald Ewen gave an overview of the minor changes made. The future cull section, HIA section and SSSI Site Condition section to be completed after discussions at the meeting. The aim to have the plan ready for review in mid-June. Approved by the end of June for publication in July.

Deer Management Plan Group Operation Paper:

As above.

NatureScot and Government Policy Update:

Natural Environment Act

Key changes:

There are lots of detailed changes that mostly apply to wording, terminology and updating references. Many of the changes are interlinked so the implications will take some time to work through. There is a new regulatory powers (Section 6ZB) which can use “nature restoration” as a trigger for intervention. This is in addition to our current powers to respond to damage, essentially taking a more proactive approach in key areas. 6ZB will be linked to a priority areas and nation strategies of which Jura is not part of so there are no plans to make use of this new power on Jura.

The most relevant to Jura are:

- o A new ground for intervention or trigger for regulation based on ‘nature restoration’. This will be in addition to our current ability to regulate where there is ‘damage’.
- o Creation of a new Register of Authorised Persons; this will be a requirement for anyone who wants to shoot deer unaccompanied in Scotland and will also allow for registration of authorisations for specified activities.
- o Streamlining and modernising of the process from section 6A, 7 & 8.

- o Creation of new authorisations; driving deer with a moving vehicle and shooting deer with a shotgun.
- o Occupiers' rights.

Jura Culls

- NatureScot welcomes to sustained increase in culls to almost 950 deer in 25/26
- Counts
- Based on the foot count it is noted that the density has remained largely similar to the previous years count at around 14.5 deer/km².
 - In recent years, Jura population density seemed to be increasing in small increments each season, however, it is apparent from the increased culling activity and discussions with NatureScot that the Group has taken action to address.
 - If the Group wishes to continue reducing the overall density to something closer to the Scottish Government target of 10 deer/km² then increased hind culling will likely be required.

Habitat Impact Assessment

Peatland Action (via Argyll Countryside Trust) visited Ardlussa estate this spring to test out the new habitat impact assessment methodologies – one of which focuses on grasslands. Although a report is yet to be published, it was noted by the Peatland Action officer that they expect the impact on peatlands to be low but cannot comment on the grassland methods till they have been provided with guidance on how to interpret the data. It is still the intention of NatureScot to role the updated methodologies out across Jura when ready.

Site condition monitoring SSSI

NatureScot commissioned an independent ecologist to complete condition monitoring of the Jura woodland SSSI. Summary of results are as follows:

1) Kinuachdrach –

Features: Upland oak woodland (SSSI): **unfavourable – recovering** (2025)

Unfavourable has been selected on account of one target not being met:

The target for grazing/browsing as relating to regeneration potential was not low.

Pests and pathogens were noted (ash dieback disease) but do not affect the condition Assessment.

Previous assessment was unfavourable declining (2009) so there is a slight improvement because of management in place (fencing) but still work to be done.

2) Craighouse ravine –

Features: Upland oak woodland (SSSI): **unfavourable – declining** (2025)

Unfavourable has been selected on account of two targets not being met:

The target of low grazing/browsing as relating to regeneration potential in those areas accessible to herbivores (a proportion of the site is not accessible, or of limited accessibility, to herbivores) was not met.

> 5% cover of the SSSI comprises non-native species (most significantly Rhododendron, Fuchsia magellanica (Fuchsia), beech, Tolmiea menziesii (Pick-a-back-plant)). Non-natives were an issue in all woodland layers. Cover definitely exceeds 5%, is likely to be in the region of 10-20%, but it's possible that it could be closer to 30%.

Previous assessment was favourable (2009) so immediate action is required to reverse the decline in condition

3) Doire Dhonn –

Features: Upland oak woodland (SSSI): **unfavourable – declining** (2025)

Justification:

Unfavourable has been selected on account of two targets not being met:

The target of low for grazing/browsing as relating to regeneration potential was not met.

>5% cover of the SSSI comprises non-native species; Rhododendron being the main issue

Pests and pathogens were noted (ash dieback disease) but do not affect the condition assessment.

The last assessment had it as unfavourable so there is no change since then. NatureScot expects with the increased effort in deer management we will see improvements but issues with rhododendron will remain challenging.

Summary

- NatureScot welcomes the progress made by Jura DMG in recent years, particularly in relation to increased culling and updating of their deer management plan. It would be sensible for estates to review hind cull and consider a further increase to aid reduction of island density. NatureScot can support with population modelling

- The recent count demonstrates positive action from the Group and NatureScot encourages all involved to maintain this effort.

- NatureScot wishes to encourage those responsible to review the recent SCM report and consider how they will improve the condition of the Woodland SSSI on Jura – in particular the Craighouse Ravine which has been moved into Unfavourable condition.

Game Dealers/Venison sales:

Bruce Cooper of Highland Game Ltd gave an overview of the overall venison market. Despite the growth in demand, the wholesale price remains low. The high processing overheads, issues of standardising quality control, ever rising fuel cost all contribute to a low margin profit at the process level. Plus, the overlying ferry problems to the islands make it difficult to project Jura venison as a premium product when trying to get into the mainstream markets. Highland Game believe it would be helpful if more or all the Jura estates were in the SQVA, seen as a “Red Tractor” for venison. The scheme is 80% administration and Highland Game are available to assist Estates to become accredited. They are currently offering a 40p/kg premium for SQVA venison, but this was questioned by some present. The new collection regime on Jura, of the lorry going up to Tarbert had improved the collection from the north estates greatly. Highland Game now have an App which will allow estates to inform when there are carcasses for collection and the carrier to confirm when there will be an uplift. This will perhaps reduce the number of condemned carcasses. Highland Game are looking at the possibility of a collection point on Islay. This would perhaps allow them to make two uplifts a week with a smaller van. Bruce asked if there would be more carcasses nearer the start of the season but was informed that these are either utilised by the estates themselves or are sold to Wild Jura Venison Ltd. Bruce informed those present that this season’s price will not be set until July.

Estate Reports:

- a. Deer Counts. A full island count had been achieved with a total of 5272 animals, of which 2048 were stags, 2439 hinds and 785 calves. (2025 total was 5239).
- b. Cull proposed. All estates are proposing a similar number to last season, which will equate to Barnhill 28 s – 40 h/c, Ardlussa 55 s – 100 h/c, Ruantallain 75 s -120 h/c, Tarbert 50 s – 90 h/c, Forest 18 s – 15 h/c, Inver 42 s – 60 h/c, Ardfin 54 s – 120 h/c.
- c. Observed deer health. Despite the wet winter deer generally seemed to be in reasonable condition. Animals with pin teeth are still in noticeable numbers, also animals digging in bracken areas is more noticeable. General comment was that there seemed to be a lot of late calves. Winter mortality appeared to be low.
- d. Deer Vehicle Collisions. One reported at Ardfin.

Habitat Monitoring

Inver Estate had undertaken an extensive environmental survey in 2025 as part of the BPS scheme. There appears to be a disconnect between NatureScot and the Department of Agriculture in relation to the potential to gather a significant data set. The Chairman suggested NatureScot engage with the Department to see what could be done. Action: JAL to send contact to Nathan Berry.

Training

The Islay Natural History Trust had arranged herbicide spray training, in line with the aims of the Invasive Plant Project. Martin Young has undertaken training. There are others on Jura who now hold the qualification. There are four people who would like to complete their DSC Level2, if it can be arranged. There would also be an interest in any machine training.

DMG Website:

To be updated as required.

Mink:

Some estates have traps out and are getting mink. NatureScot confirmed that it is unlikely there will be any funding for a non-native species eradication scheme for Jura in the near future.

Finance & Division of Costs:

Donald Ewen will invoice the estates individually for the cost of the Management Plan update.

Any Other Business:

Ruantallain and Ardlussa Estates may be doing a programme with BBC Landward in the near future.

A French broadcaster had asked if anyone could film with them, but the dates were not suitable as was a request from an individual regarding stalking.

NatureScot had undertaken a drone count over the woodlands in South Islay. Whilst this had been successful in this case, CAA restrictions limit the use of drones for counting purposes.

The Police Scotland officers said that they were not aware of poaching incidents or other illegal activity on Jura regarding deer.

Date of Next Meeting:

Date of the Annual General Meeting to be agreed for November 2026.

The Chair thanked members for attending and closed the meeting.