

# **Monadhliath DMG: Overview of the SDMP**

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# Presentation structure

Introduction from Drew...

- MDMG background
- Project background & scope
- Planning process: overview
- Review of DM: key findings
- Moving forwards...
- Overarching concepts
- Broad aims of SDMP...

...Discussion of detailed proposals

# MDMG Background

- Very large DMG
- 150,000ha land; > 40 owners
- Formed in 1960's – long history
- Fenced RDMA > manage stags
- Big changes from 90's onwards
  - Ownership & objectives
  - Conservation, grouse, windfarms
  - Designation of European sites
- Good relations in early days
- But progressive loss from late 90's
- Serious difficulties by 2000's

# Project background & scope of works

- Update plan in line with Code of Practice
- Take full account: private & public interest
- Framework for sust' deer management
  - Set out clear proposals
  - Identify key prior's including potential conflicts
  - Detailed processes to address key priorities
  - Identify best ways for information to flow
- Produce strategic DMP(s)
  - 10 years
  - Welfare, Environment, Economic development, Social well being
  - Take into account current policy context
  - Anticipated changes over period
  - Collective series of objectives & actions

# Planning Process

- Task group formed / tender
- Jul 13 – Feb 15 (18 months)
- Met initially with:
  - TG, DMG, SNH
- Requested agencies info'
- Met with estates (up to 3 people)
- Structured interviews / site visits
- Detailed analysis: agencies / estates
- **Review of DM** produced / discussed
- **SDMP** developed from recc's
- Consult on it / finalise / deliver it...

# Review: Findings (I)

- Owners – some hard to tie down
- Long timeline for data
  - Identify, collate, cleanse, process & interpret
  - Interpret diff views – same estate!
- Highly complex ownership:
  - High level of change since 60's
  - Now very different..
    - Varied mixture of interests
    - Trying to co-exist side-by-side
    - High incidence: ownership changes
    - Lot of concern over future

# Review: Findings (II)

- Major diff's in way estates run
  - Fully commercial / partly / not at all
  - Resident owner / regular / occas'
  - Owner run / keeper run
  - Lots of keepers / few / none
  - Inevitable change (e.g. owners ageing)
  - Windfarm funding or not
- Socio-economics
  - 74 FTE keepers (56E and 18W)
  - 23 = deer / 51 = 'other activities'
  - Deer FTE's: 8 commercial / 15 'family'
  - Approx. £500k sales income (= salaries)

# Review: Findings (III)

- Highly complex landscape
  - Few major valleys + high plateau
  - Most low ground fenced out
  - Relatively limited woodland
  - Occasional areas: better soil
- Major east-west differences
  - Landscape very different
  - Climate very different: dry-wet
  - Grouse dominance to east
  - Windfarm developments to east
  - Most SAC's to east



# Review: Findings (IV)

- Deer population in RDMA
  - Lots of movement (local and regional)
    - Identifiable stag wintering
    - Summering mainly on plateau
  - Numbers rose 1960's – 1990's
  - Numbers declined 2004-2013
    - 21,484 to 18,984 (winter count; 12%)
    - All change in eastern zone
  - Bias towards hinds:
    - Mainly east (5,380: 3,110 stags; 1.73)
    - Less so west (3,860: 3,020 stags; 1.28)
  - Local densities vary widely
    - Winter 3-23 per km<sup>2</sup> (all land)
    - But long-term gradients sustained
  - High concentrations of hinds in valleys
  - Range compression: 15km<sup>2</sup> actually 30km<sup>2</sup>
- Outside RDMA: little known...

# Review: Findings (V)

- Designated sites in RDMA
  - Creag Meagaidh: broadly acceptable
  - Kinveachy wood: SNH report improving
  - Glen Tarff wood: unfavourable (herb's)
  - Monadhliath bog: unfavourable
    - Many deer summer (3,000+) / rising?
    - Dispute over causes of 'damage'
      - Contradictory evidence
      - Query over definitions/methods
      - > Not enough knowledge of process
  - Craig Dhu wood (SSSI): impacts apparent
- Wider issues of impact
  - Other native woodland remnants
  - Heather moorland (localised)
  - Agricultural land (crofters)
  - Forestry companies
  - Road users / local communities

# Review: Summary

- Ownership pattern is complex and changing
- Economics fragile
- Landscape has fundamental limits
- Deer population is highly mobile and interconnected
- Policy & legal context is shifting quickly
- DMG needs better funding and formal structures in place
- A formal plan of action is therefore needed!

# Moving forwards...

- DMG would benefit from quite a lot of change
  - Get everyone on board BUT keep them there
  - Develop a realistic timeline and don't rush
- Work within current constraints
  - Legal & policy; financial
  - Environmental & practical
- Seek common ground
  - Respect each others views / inform each other
  - Similarities not differences
  - All owners interested in desig' sites
  - All owners interested in deer welfare
  - All owners interested in sust' manag'
- Find a common currency
  - Almost every estate wants sporting stags
- Embrace innovation & change where it is needed
- Promote collaboration & communication
  - Joint projects promote regular/better communication
  - Manage conflict & negativity before it takes hold

# Overarching concepts

- Concepts for ‘deer-focused’ owners
  - Reduce hind populations locally to produce high quality stags (target is 1:1 adult sex ratio)
  - Expand ‘missing’ habitats for stags to winter in
  - Expand overall area for stags to range in
  - Improve quality of current habitat for stags
  - “Populations resilient, self-contained and less likely to move”
  - Encourage research & monitoring > learn more!
- >> Public benefits (+ for other estate’s)...
  - Reduced local deer densities
    - Reduced conflicts with other land users
    - Reduced tensions within DMG – ‘positive trajectory’
  - Population trajectory = declining
    - Marked improvements on designated sites
      - Improve current condition
      - BUT expansion is actually the key aim (remnants)
    - Wider environmental improvements inevitable also
  - SNH funds are used ‘positively’ (i.e. to help)
  - DMG is ‘hub’ for decision-making in uplands

# Aims of SDMP

- Manage for appropriate local deer densities
  - Produce stags but not at others expense
- Deliver significant public benefits
  - Focus on European sites; wider if poss'
- Create rural employment
  - Promote & sustain jobs
- Promote voluntary approach
- Focus on landscape scale delivery
  - Work together on deer herd & habitat
- Encourage pre-emptive action
- Develop best practice approach

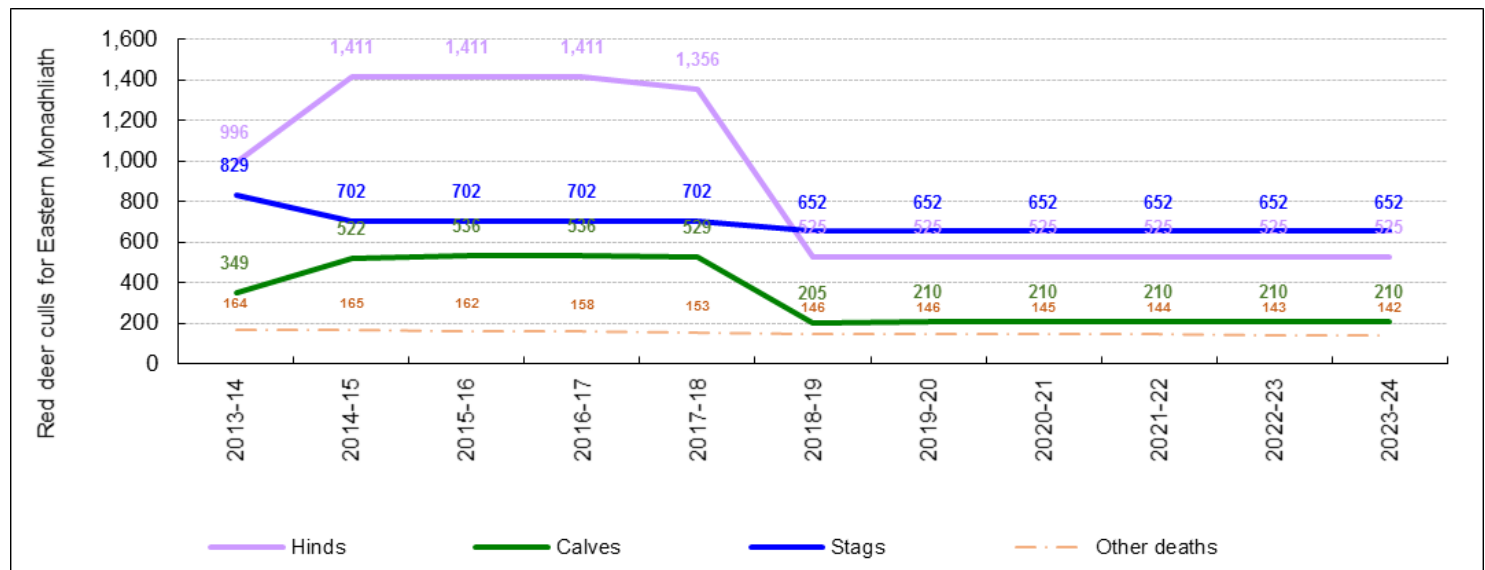
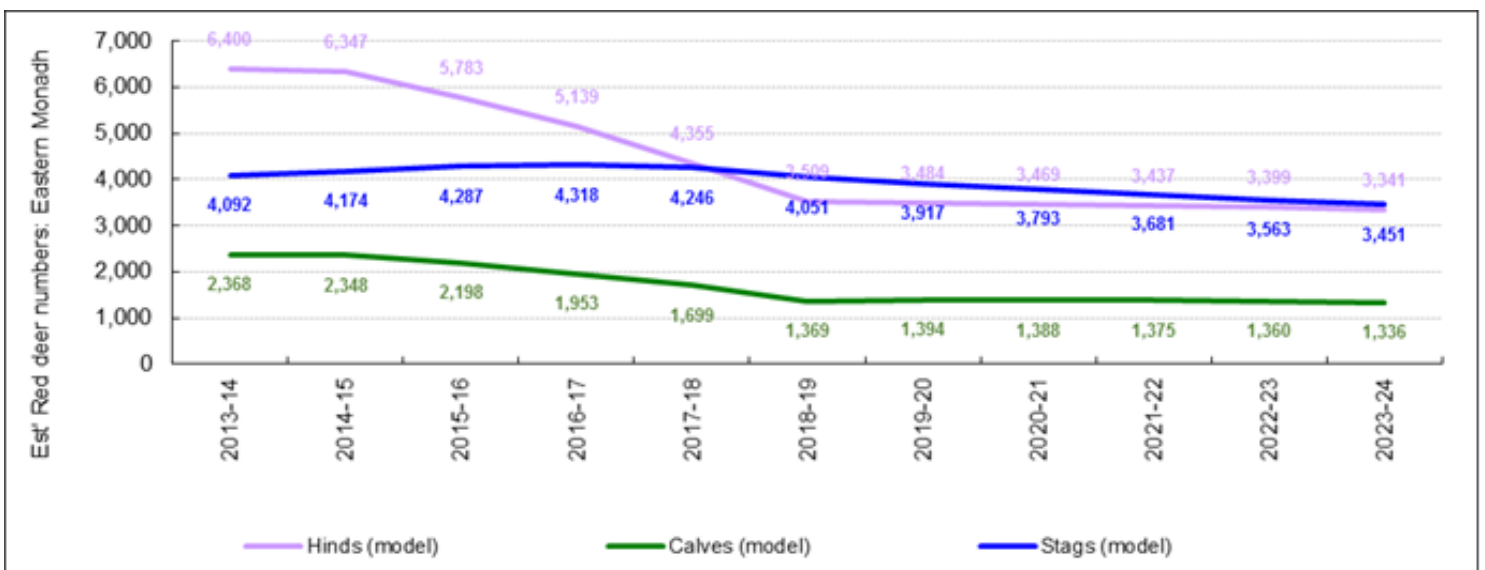
# Stag management plans

- Open up existing woodland for wintering
  - Re-align RDMA / remove older fences
- Open up excluded low ground for winter
  - Re-align RDMA fences
- Expand heather cover for wintering\*
  - Low & middle altitudes
- Expand woodland cover for wintering
  - Focus on natural regeneration of native woodlands where possible (esp. SAC's)
  - Rotational deer fenced enclosures
- Reduce non-sporting cull where possible
  - Coignafearn down by 125 stags / others...
- Reduce hind densities locally & regionally
  - Many reductions planned already
    - Glenmazeran & Dalmigavie / Culachy, Glenshero & Braeroy
  - Some negotiated as part of the planning process

Mainly Eastern Monadhliath

# Planned culls & predicted effects (I)

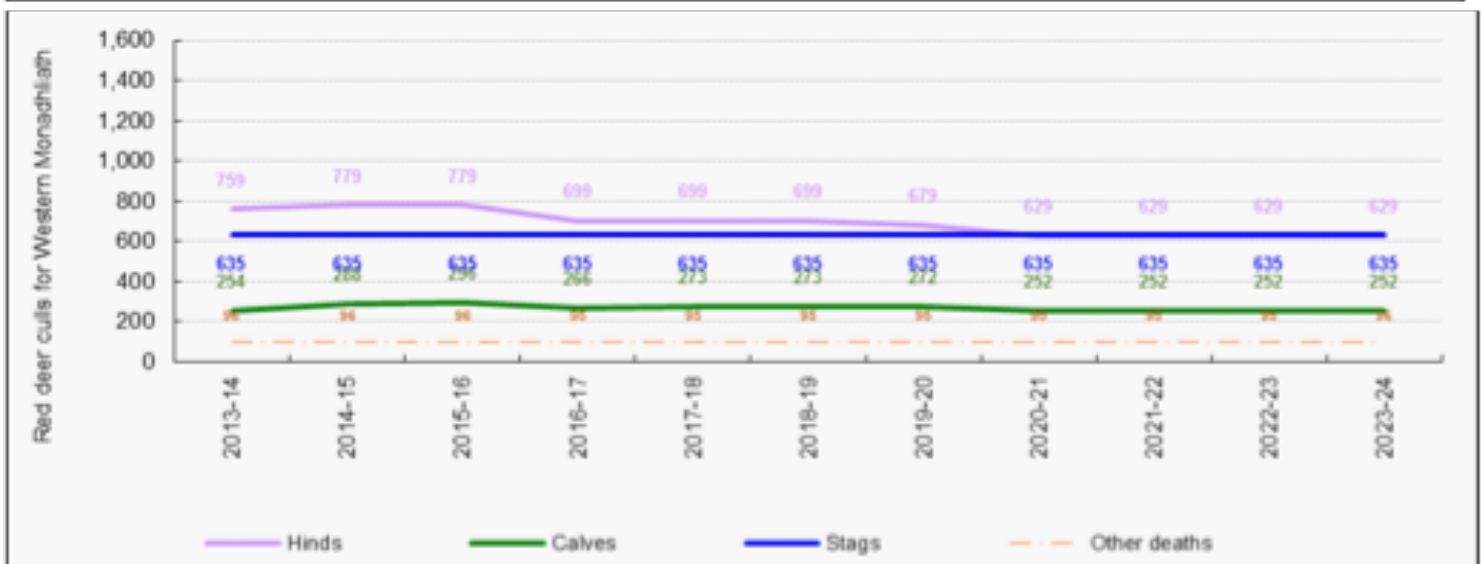
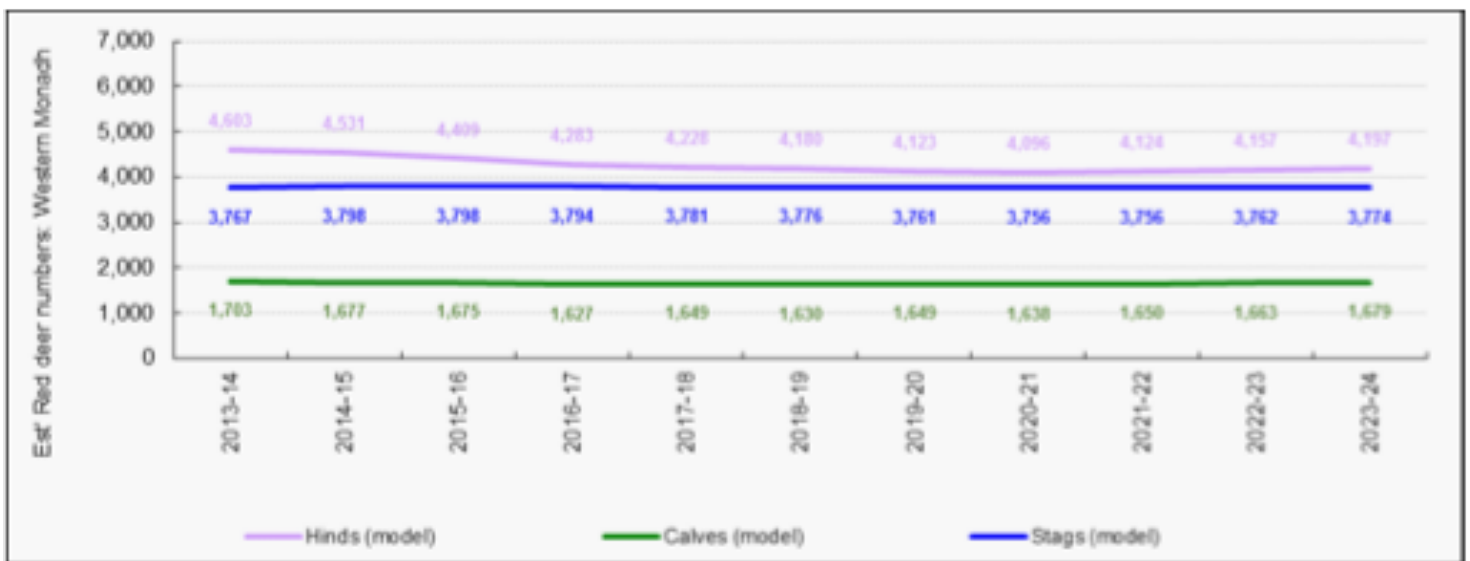
- Eastern (12,860 to 8,136; 50% drop in hinds)





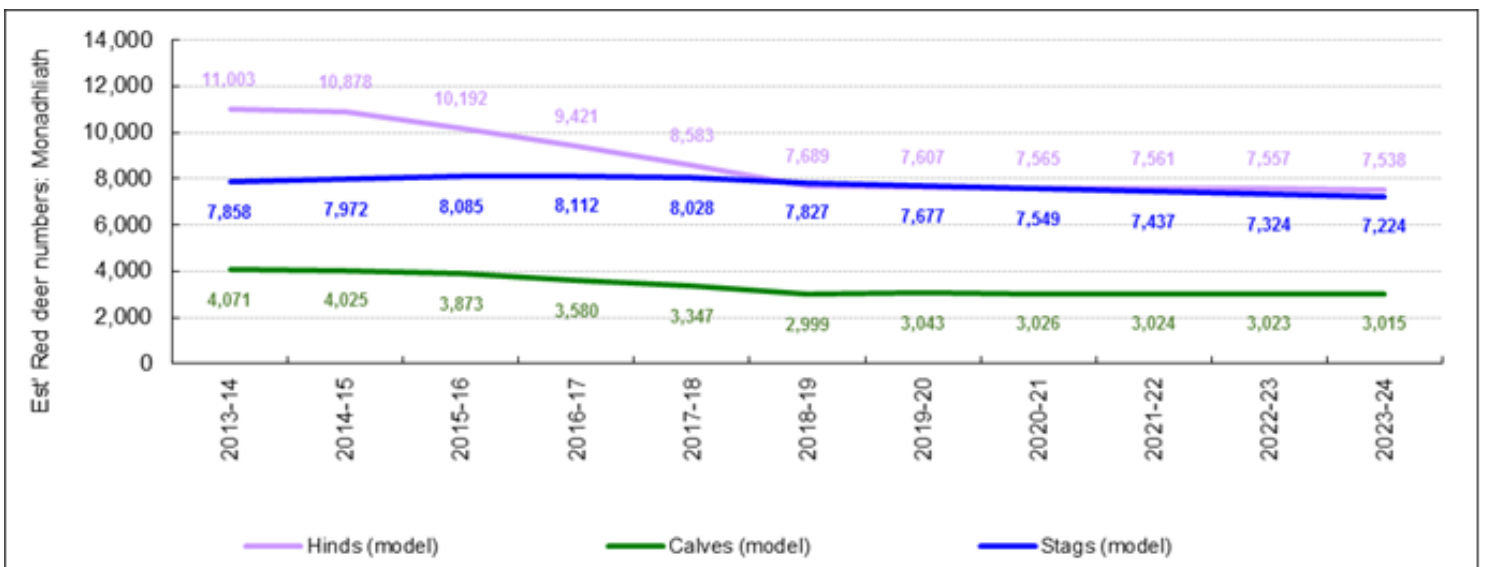
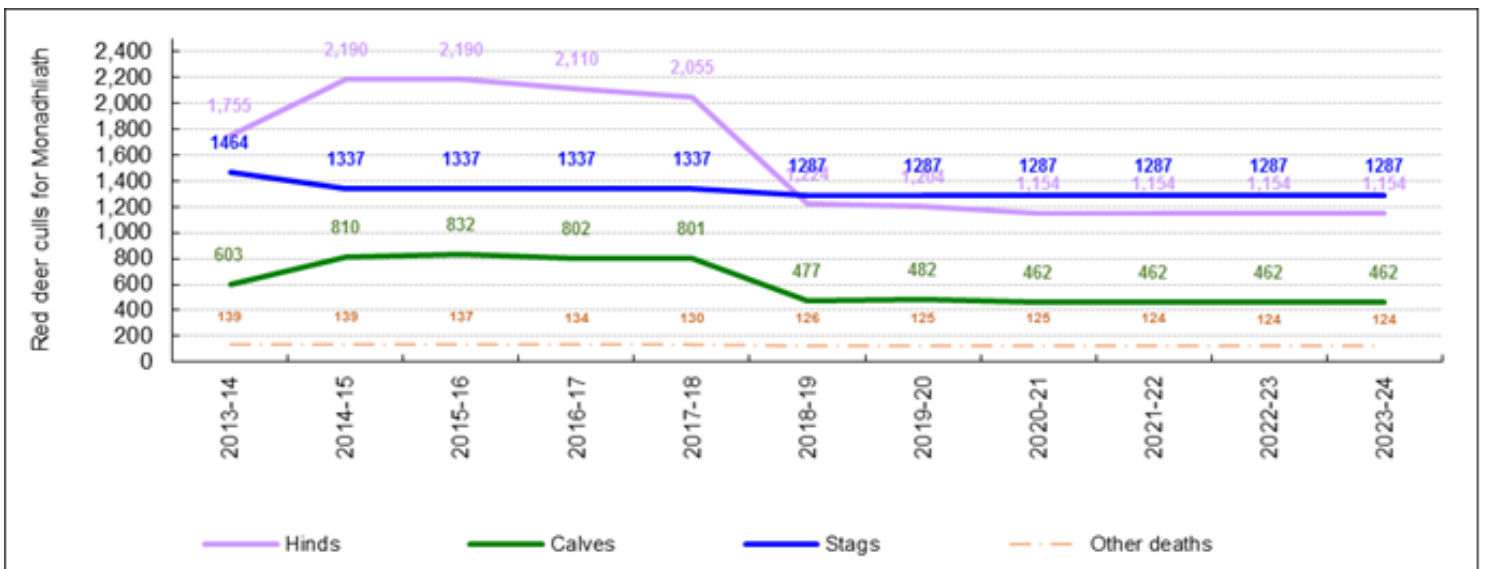
# Planned culls & predicted effects (II)

- Western (10,073 – 9,650; c. 10% drop hinds)



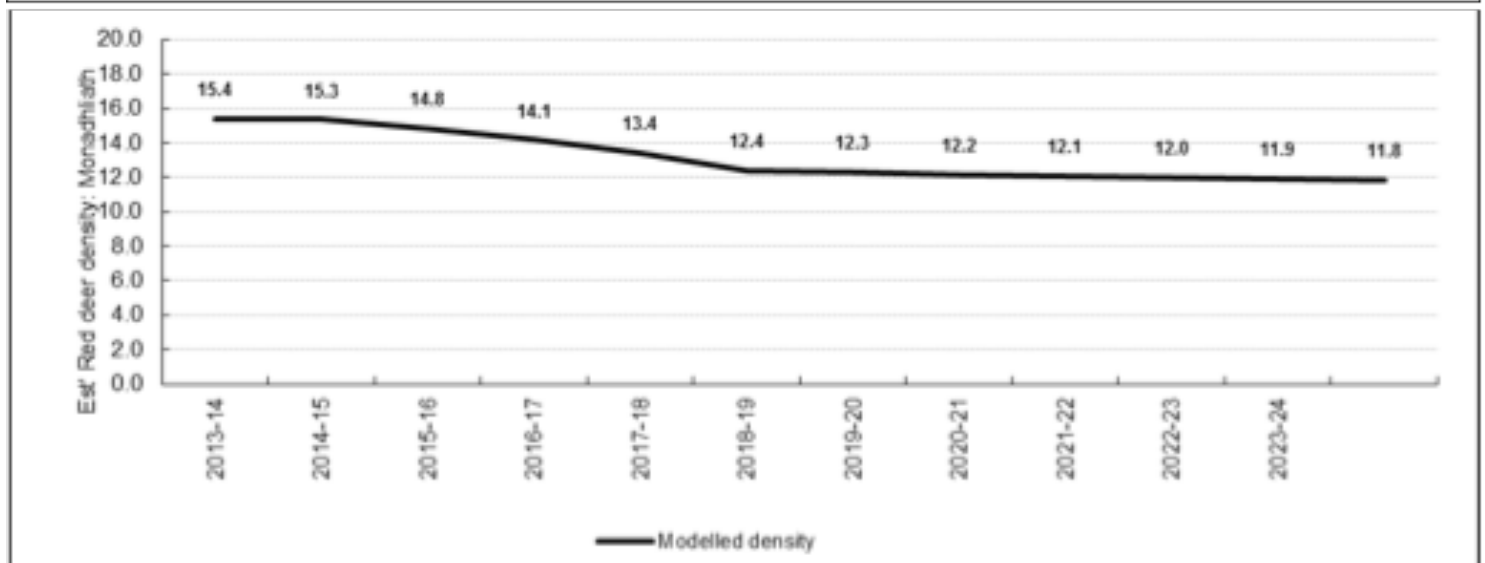
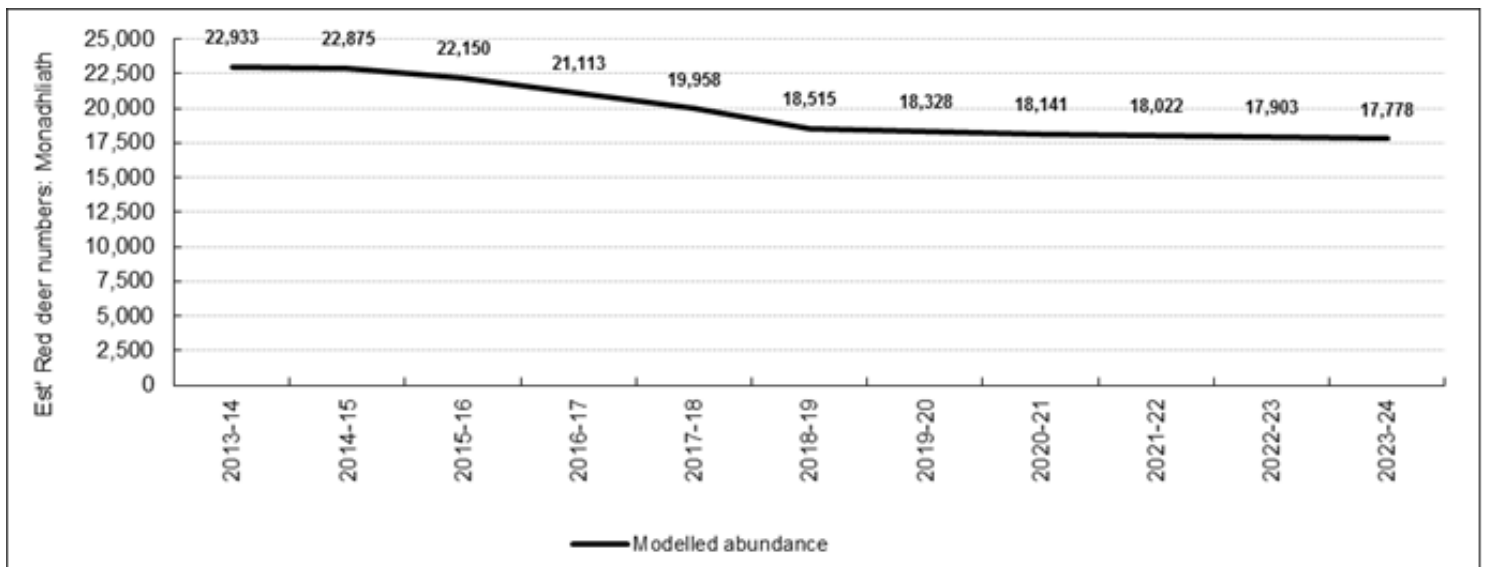
# Planned culs & predicted effects (III)

- RDMA (22,933 – 17,786; 32% drop hind)



# Planned culls & predicted effects (IV)

- 22% down overall, within 5 years



# SDMP: Other Aims (I)

- All estates involved
- Group structure
  - Merge Strathnairn & Strathspey
  - Consider E–W split in due course
- Maintain RDMA fence (5yr review)
- LGDMA: active manage' from 2018
- Program of research & monitoring:
  - Undercounts in woodland
  - High altitude peatland dynamics & condition (deer vs non-deer factors)
  - Effects of sheep removal
  - Density-dependent effects on stags
- Habitat management (as outlined)
  - Blanket bog, native woodland & heathland

# SDMP: Other Aims (II)

- DMG changes
  - New constitution (1 m = 1 vote)
  - New chairman & vice (support)
  - Create other roles (share work)
  - Subscriptions
    - Revised allocation mechanism
    - Raise extra subscriptions to fund SDMP
  - Annual report
    - Formal request for culls / updates: March
    - Report: culls, models, updates & news
  - Meet twice a year
    - April: ‘deer management’
    - August: ‘business’
  - SDMP reviews
    - Annual report / minutes = annexes to SDMP
    - 5 year and 10 year reviews

# Meeting attendees today...

- What we need from you!
  - Comments on our plans for the RDMA
  - BUT as importantly, help to scope out and produce a plan for the LGDMA over the next 5 years
    - Identify ownership patters
    - Identify potential /actual land use conflicts
    - Fencing issues: current & likely future
    - Road traffic accident blackspots
    - Agricultural damage
    - Damage to commercial forest crops
    - Damage to private gardens
  - Need to consider the Deer Code
  - Want to deliver public benefits