

Chairman's address – MDMG 2016 AGM

2015/16 has been another thought-provoking year for land managers in Scotland, most of whom have responsibilities in one way or another involving deer management. Part 8 of the 2016 Land Reform Act is specific to deer management and in line with predictions from our senior advisors, provides a range of new legal requirements on deer managers with much stiffer penalties for noncompliance. In addition to these measures, our sector will also be subject to the proposed reintroduction of Sporting Rates in April next year. Assessors will undertake a valuation of all land with sporting rights, whether these rights are exercised or not and a levy applied by your local authority. This week which heralds the start of the grouse season is also a key earning opportunity for several conservation bodies who by dint of miraculous fortune, find catalogues of dead birds to bring to the notice of the media – every year like clockwork in the second week of August. You couldn't make it up but they do. I will leave out any substantive comments on Brexit or a second referendum but if politicians had to have their forward plans assessed by the ADMG benchmark there would be a deal of red ink on the page.

Nonetheless we must remain as we are, good partners in a world of cynics.

For the Monadhliaths DMG it has been our second year of our SDMP and like the curate's egg bits have been good and others not so. However I am very pleased to say that this the most complicated of DMG's, remains in the main together, still talking and managing to move forward if a little slowly and hesitantly in some areas. This is not a criticism of you, just the reality of trying to manage the business we are carrying out.

Dougie will provide you with the details of the work we are carrying out but I wish to mention some of the headlines.

First an apology – I did promise to hold an EGM to deal with the detail of our Constitution which weight of work made impossible. Your Executive took on the role and agreed the document earlier this year primarily to allow us to manage our banking business. I trust you will accept this lapse and I will undertake to conduct a review the document at the midterm AGM.

Your Executive also carried out a small redaction of the SDMP to allow the bulk of the document to be published on the Monadhliath section of the ADMG website together with an account of our first Stakeholder Awareness day at Alvie in June 2015. It is our intention to publish all of our general meeting notes and news on this website going forward. We have agreed this year to look more closely at SACs, Woodland Creation and opening enclosed woodland areas where possible to this end we have invited Will Anderson of Seafield and Strathspey Estates to join the Executive.

We held our second Stakeholder event at Tomatin in June this year attended by around 45 people. We used the day to deal with our cull figures, to seek the views of local people in and around Tomatin and offer the floor to all attendees.

We are also made a visit to the fenced regen site at Coignafearn for which we are grateful to the estate staff who facilitated the visit and provided some light refreshment afterwards when we conducted a no-holds barred discussion with stalkers. The event was well attended and provided us again with some very positive feedback on deer management but I think for next year we must try harder to drill into some of the issues highlighted in the Code of Practice. It is our intention to hold next year's stakeholder meeting at Glenfeshie on **19th May** and explore in detail one or more of the contentious issues with the aim of producing debate. ADMG invited me to present on the structure of our Stakeholder meeting and I am aware that several DMGs have either absorbed the idea into their own plans or are actively considering it.

We have recently completed, with the help of SNH, our DMP Assessment. While it would be good in this mid Olympic period to advise that our team have come away with the Gold medal, we will have to be satisfied this year with the knowledge that we are competitive with the best but it may be some time before we hear the national anthem being played for us in Great Glen House. I am sure Dougie will refer to this himself but I am satisfied that we have been dealing with the priority issues facing this group, communications between members and areas within the group culls, stakeholder engagement, sorting out our finances and constitution, making sure we get these in place before we begin to tackle our lengthy list of actions.

One of the disappointments of the year has been the resignations of Glen Gloy and Clune from the DMG. I've asked the Secretary to arrange meetings with them to reinforce the need for us to stick together in this journey. It is clear that even outwith the DMG both estates will still be required to fulfil their duties and provide us with their data. If any members have direct contact with either estate I would appreciate a few words with you after the meeting to discuss a peer to peer approach to them.

Some of you will be aware that we made an abortive attempt at an ECAF application during the xmas break last winter. With the best of intentions we examined the potential of this scheme for those members who had indicated an interest in Peatland Restoration but by the start of January it had become clear that the risks associated with the scheme were too great for our small team to bear and we had to abandon the project. Given the recent referendum decision, this may have been a blessing.

If I have to make two pleas for the coming year it will be that we start to make cross estate collaboration on our coming season's culls a normal practice. It is clear that the single estate operation is not achieving our targets and to get back on target we will need two years of increased collaborative effort in the central area of the group. This will allow us to radically drop our cull requirements in line with the plan at least until our next helicopter counts take place. Dougie will fill out this issue in his presentation but it is absolutely essential that we use this year and next to get back on target. To assist in the preparation for this exercise, the Exec has invited Faye Gonzalez to join us. As part of this process we need you submit your cull figures this coming year on time and with a completed questionnaire. On the latter we have made this as user friendly as possible so

please complete these by the deadline, it is ultimately in your interests to get the information in to us.

In rounding up I would like to thank my colleagues on the Executive Committee for their close attention to the tasks they have been carrying out on your behalf, to Dougie Campbell and his team for their support during the year and to Strutt and Parker for their practical support, in particular in eventually resolving our little banking crisis with the Bank of Scotland in Inverness who, I have to say would have lost our business but for the diligence of one of their staff. I have called on a number of you during the year to assist with various issues, Cullachy, Coignafearn, Aberarder, Glenmazeran, Alvie, Balavil, and others and for your help, thanks.

I would also like to note with some pleasure the recent establishment of stalker/Keeper/community groups set up at Tomatin and Loch Ness to show the world a rather different and more positive view of country sports, estates and the great people who live and work on them. More power to those people. Finally I attended the funeral of Charles Connell on your behalf in November last year and while most of you will have known Charles much longer than I - his interventions and wise words were instrumental in putting our DMP in place. Might I suggest a minute silence to respect his passing.

Executive Committee dates Thursdays 15 Sept; 26 January; 4 May; 28 Sept