

**Output:** A report on a review females culled in close season

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## 1 Background:

As outlined in the Responsibility of Care project rationale, DCS has identified a requirement to develop with the deer sector an agreed “Responsibility of care for those who manage wild deer” to underpin sustainable deer management. This is in part driven by a need to improve the understanding of deer management by the general public as well as promoting appropriate deer welfare and land management standards.

One of the most important perceived issues in relation to deer welfare is the culling of females in the close season (as identified by stakeholders in the consultation on seasons – ‘A number of respondents commented on the ‘distasteful’ aspect of shooting pregnant hinds and felt there were welfare considerations to shooting females at certain periods) specifically in relation to the potential for dependent young to be orphaned.

Deer can be culled in the close season either under owner / occupier rights (section 26(1) and 2(a,b,c) of the Deer (Scotland) Act 1996), and to prevent damage or for scientific purposes under various other sections of the Act detailed below. The purpose of this report is to review the effectiveness of current systems in securing the welfare of dependent young associated with female deer culled in the close season.

## 2 Method:

### Game Dealer Data

Game Dealer Data is collated via Venison returns. As outlined in ‘A report on the limitations of data currently collected’ the Act only requires venison dealers to collect specific data and provide DCS with powers of inspection for that data. Consequently data is collected on females and calves together (not separately) and only a sub-sample of all data is provided (voluntarily) to DCS.

Data in relation to females and calves culled in the close seasons from Venison records for the periods 04/05 and 05/06 are represented in Tables 1&2.

**Table 1: Females and calves culled from venison dealer records 04/05**

MONTH	Red	Sika	Fallow	Roe	Total
APRIL	73	1	1	278	353
MAY	19	3	0	12	34
JUNE	16	0	1	17	34
JULY	37	0	2	35	74
AUGUST	67	0	4	27	98
SEPTEMBER	108	73	11	24	216
OCTOBER	603	76	15	352	1046
NOVEMBER	0	0	0	0	0
DECEMBER	0	0	0	0	0
JANUARY	0	0	0	0	0
FEBRUARY	2158	99	15	0	2272
MARCH	805	203	59	0	1067
<b>Totals</b>	<b>3886</b>	<b>455</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>745</b>	<b>5194</b>

**Table 2: Females and calves culled from venison dealer records 05/06**

MONTH	Red	Sika	Fallow	Roe	Total
APRIL	43	1	1	18	63
MAY	65	0	9	66	140
JUNE	31	0	3	17	51
JULY	17	1	1	5	24
AUGUST	23	0	2	20	45
SEPTEMBER	58	92	3	10	163
OCTOBER	485	77	51	418	1031
NOVEMBER	0	0	0	31	31
DECEMBER	0	0	0	0	0
JANUARY	0	5	0	0	5
FEBRUARY	221	77	19	0	317
MARCH	1190	216	87	0	1493
<b>Totals</b>	<b>2133</b>	<b>469</b>	<b>176</b>	<b>585</b>	<b>3363</b>

  = Period during which Authorisations state that sexually mature females should not be shot

Currently there is no way of knowing what percentage of the deer in Tables 1 and 2 DCS have been culled under DCS Authorisation as data on Venison returns can and is duplicated on Authorisation returns without any way of knowing when this happens.

DCS Authorisations Data

DCS issue Authorisations as per the following sections of the Deer Act:

- o 5(6) in close season on unenclosed land, natural heritage and public safety
- o 5(7) for scientific purposes during the close seasons
- o 7 as part of a Control Agreement
- o 10 as part of an Emergency Measure
- o 18(2) night shooting – a separate Authorisation is needed if the shooting is to take place out of season
- o 19(2) driving deer with a vehicle
- o 26(2) in close season on enclosed land – previously but no longer.

In approving an Authorisation DCS is making a judgement, based on a cost/benefit model with the cost being deer welfare and the benefit being removing the risk of damage caused by deer (or an increase in scientific knowledge in the case of 5(6)). All authorisations issued state as a condition that sexually mature females should not be shot between 1<sup>st</sup> May and 31<sup>st</sup> August. The closed seasons for female deer (16<sup>th</sup> Feb – 20<sup>th</sup> Oct for Red, Sika and Fallow and 1<sup>st</sup> April to 20<sup>th</sup> Oct for Roe) are longer than this sensitive period.

Data on Authorisations issued in 04/05 and 05/06 is represented in Table 3.

**Table 3: Authorisation Records 04/05 and 05/06:**

Year	Section of deer act	Red Female	Sika Female	Roe Female	Fallow Female	Total
<b>Closed Season</b>		16 <sup>th</sup> Feb – 20 <sup>th</sup> Oct	16 <sup>th</sup> Feb – 20 <sup>th</sup> Oct	1 <sup>st</sup> April – 20 <sup>th</sup> Oct	16 <sup>th</sup> Feb – 20 <sup>th</sup> Oct	
<b>2004/05</b>	<b>5(6)</b>	440	16	168	0	624
	<b>10(4)</b>	0	0	0	0	0
	<b>26(2)</b>	268	118	241	0	627
						<b>1251</b>
<b>2005/06</b>	<b>5(6)</b>	468	32	85	0	585
	<b>10(4)</b>	706	0	0	5	711
	<b>26(2)</b>	83	10	97	0	190
						<b>1486</b>

Authorisations Refused:

To refuse an Authorisation the appropriate Technical staff member has to justify the reason for refusal. One of the criteria against which this judgement can be made is if ‘the severity of the welfare impact outweighs the damage’. This decision to refuse an Authorisation then has to be signed off by senior management.

To date DCS has not refused any Authorisations on welfare grounds. This is partly because the Commission adopts a pragmatic approach and deters applicants requesting an Authorisation in a situation where DCS believes welfare may be compromised from applying in the first place. A realistic estimate of the number of Authorisations deterred in this manner is somewhere in the region of 12-20 per year. As a rough estimate this is approximately 2% of DCS Authorisations. This process furthers the effective ban on culling females in the most sensitive period imposed by the Authorisation process.

### **3 Implications and Options:**

Two main issues arise from this report 1) data currently collected is not comprehensive and is duplicated (i.e. there is no way of knowing how many of the out of season venison returns were duplicated under the Authorisation returns and how many venison returns there actually were; 2) there is a considerable difference between the numbers of deer culled out of season under Authorisation and those processed through Game Dealers (3943 in 04/05 and 1877 05/06). 1) is being addressed through the Unified Data Project, 2) shows that for both years the majority of deer culled out of season are done so under owner / occupier rights with no external scrutiny of the welfare cost benefit analysis being undertaken. Potentially there are areas for concern as the monthly breakdown of the venison returns shows that some deer are being culled in the sensitive period (1<sup>st</sup> May to 31<sup>st</sup> August). This isn't evidence of concern just an illustration that present systems do not allow for a transparent and consistent approach.