

**Minutes of the  
283<sup>rd</sup> Meeting of the Deer Commission for Scotland held in  
Great Glen House, Inverness on  
Wednesday, 6<sup>th</sup> December 2006**

**OPEN SESSION**

**Present:** Prof J Milne (Chairman)  
Dr P Mayhew  
Dr C Shedden  
Dr A Barbour  
Mr A Hamilton  
Dr S Walker  
Prof J Pemberton  
Mr S Pepper  
Mr N Rowantree

Mr N Halfhide (Director)  
Dr D Balharry (Technical Director)  
Mr R Edwards (Head of Admin)  
Mr E Barclay (Communications Officer)

Mr A Hampson, SNH  
Mr R Dunsmore, FCS  
Mr G Selkirk, SEERAD  
Mr C McClean, CNPA

**1 OPENING REMARKS**

- 1.1 The Chairman welcomed all present to the meeting. There was 1 member of the public in attendance.
- 1.2 Apologies were received from the Earl of Dalhousie and Sir Michael Strang Steel.

**2 DRAFT MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 11<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2006****Paper: 283/1**

- 2.1 The Minutes were approved

**3 MATTER ARISING FROM MEETING HELD ON 11<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2006****Paper: 283/2**

- 3.1 Members noted the contents of Paper 283/2

**4 OVERVIEW OF RESOURCES & REVISED BUDGET FOR 2006/07****Paper: 283/3**

- 4.1 The purpose of the paper was to provide an overview of DCS' available resources against current and proposed work commitments and seek the approval of members on which pieces of work to prioritise until new posts are agreed and filled.

- 4.2 Members **noted** the current mismatch between staff time and work commitments and considered recommendations to meet this challenge over the next two financial quarters.
- 4.3 The paper recommended that:
- (a) DCS reduces the allocation of staff time in the following areas in the final quarter of 06-07 by the following:
    - 1 Competence/Unified Data/Responsibility of Care (20 days);
    - 2 Case Studies in local sustainable deer management (45 days);
    - 3 Research (20 days) and
    - 4 Advisory Deer Management (50 days);
  - (b) DCS staff reallocate time to taking forward the Management Strategy on Wild Deer; New Priority sites; and in commissioning the work associated with the Unified Data and Case Studies projects so that DCS incurs the associated spend in 06-07;
  - (c) Staff consider any further tasks which they could contract out in the near future to release more staff time;
  - (d) The Director review the situation early in 2007 and brings further advice on the first quarter of 07-08 to the Board meeting in March 2007 and
  - (e) approve the revised profile for 2006-07 as recommended by the Resources and Audit Committee.
- 4.4 Members further requested that staff advance the description of sustainable deer management as quickly as possible.
- 4.5 Following discussion, Members approved the recommendations outlined in paragraph 4.3. Members.

Action: Director
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## 5 **MANAGEMENT STRATEGY FOR WILD DEER** **Paper: 283/4**

- 5.1 The purpose of the paper before the meeting was to update Members on progress since the last Board meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2006 and to seek their approval to a number of issues.
- 5.2 Members **noted** that following the DCS Board meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2006, the Director had met with representatives of SNH, FCS and SEERAD to discuss how best to approach this work and to identify some of the key issues that DCS needed to explore further. These were then discussed in detail by the Strategy Committee on 14<sup>th</sup> November 2006.
- 5.3 The Director advised Members that he was in the process of obtaining the services of an additional member of staff on secondment to take this process forward.
- 5.4 During discussions, it was **agreed** that DCS needed to ensure that that the wider deer sector interests were included in the consultation

process. It was suggested DCS hold consultation seminars as part of the consultation process, and ensure that the process of development with stakeholders was iterative.

5.5 Members commented on the need to develop the vision first before considering its implementation, and making this order clear in the timetable.

5.6 Following discussions, it was **agreed** that:

- a) DCS seek formal guidance from the Minister to proceed under section 2.1.3 of the Management Statement.
- b) DCS set up a Steering Group comprising DCS, SNH, FCS and SEERAD to drive forward the production of the strategy; and set up a wider group comprising these public bodies, LINK, SGA, ADMG, SSPCA, BDS, SRPBA, BASC and other appropriate organisations to act as an advisory group. (It was noted that Link representation may need to comprise two or three individuals to cover eg access, biodiversity, landscape concerns)
- c) DCS notes the importance that the Scottish Executive attaches to achieving Government outcomes.
- d) DCS staff work to the proposed timetable subject to the availability of sufficient resources and subject to the draft timetable being amended to clarify when consultations with the deer sector on both the vision and strategy would occur.

<b>Action: Director</b>
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## **6 NEXT STEPS PROJECTS**

**Paper: 283/5**

6.1 The paper before the meeting sought the Board's approval to proceed with the proposed Next Steps Projects

6.2 Members were advised that the Strategy Committee had had a close involvement in the development of the project proposals and considered them at their meeting on the 14<sup>th</sup> November. At that meeting, the Strategy Committee requested staff to:

- (a) seek confirmation on FCS and SNH support for the Case studies on local sustainable deer management project;
- (b) seek clarification of the impact of SNH and FCS contributions on the budget for the Case studies on local sustainable deer management project and
- (c) that prior to starting the projects, a communications plan for each element of the project is in place and ready for issue.

6.3 The response to these three issues raised was provided as follows:

### **A Confirmation of FCS and SNH support**

6.4 FCS and SNH had received the descriptions of the project plan for the Case studies on local sustainable deer management project presented to the Strategy Committee. The meeting was advised

that, based on this project plan, they had indicated that they were aiming to:

- (a) Contribute £10K each in years 1 and 2 of the project representing a total financial contribution of £40K over two years to be allocated into financial years 07/08 and 08/09;
- (b) Contribute a maximum of 35 staff days to assist with the project spread over the first 18 months. Both FCS and SNH had expressed a desire to discuss their staff involvement in more detail and highlighted that it is difficult to commit staff time without knowing the location of the case study sites;
- (c) Confirmation of SNH and FCS funding and staff involvement will be in the form of a Partnership Agreement which will be signed if the Board approve the projects for DCS.

## **B Impact of SNH and FCS funding on the Case studies for sustainable deer management project**

- 6.5 FCS and SNH staff involvement in the case studies was essential to add value and had no impact on the planned DCS staff time input. The funding contribution would reduce the cash costs in years 07/08 from £170K down to £150K and in year 08/09 from £134K down to £114K.

## **C Communication Plan for the Next Steps Projects (to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2007)**

- 6.6 To date DCS had provided details about the Next Steps projects in the Annual Report 2005/2006 (Section 3.1) and there had been mention of the projects in the sporting press (Shooting Times, 2<sup>nd</sup> Nov 2006). The paper provided brief details of the communications programme for the project to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2007. Details for 07/08 would be incorporated into the DCS Communications Annual Plan to be discussed by the Strategy Committee on 29<sup>th</sup> January 2007 and the DCS Board on 7<sup>th</sup> March 2007.
- 6.7 DCS Board Members and staff would receive a detailed briefing about the projects in January, including a Q&A document, and regular updates throughout the course of each project.
- 6.8 Key messages for each of the four projects would be developed by the Communications Officer in conjunction with the relevant member of staff and these would be aligned to the different target audiences. The key messages would be used to define the content of the information on the Next Steps projects for the different stages of the Communications plan as it progressed.
- 6.9 The meeting was also informed that the DCS website would contain a page about the Next Steps Projects setting out the background details, its relation to Close Seasons Consultation, etc, by 20<sup>th</sup> January 2007. This would be designed so that more information could be added as the projects progress. In addition, contact would be made with the sporting press – magazines and websites – and established newsletters and publications produced by other

organisations (BASC, BDS, etc) with a view to running feature articles on the projects. The proposed date for articles was 26<sup>th</sup> January 2007.

- 6.10 During discussions, mention was made of the need to ensure that there were sufficient resources to take the projects forward and that consideration be given to contracting some of the work out in this financial year.
- 6.11 Mention was also made of the need to include all relevant interests in the Case Studies and that the process must be seen as being open and inclusive.
- 6.12 Following discussion, Members **approved**:
- (a) the descriptions of the Next Steps projects as provided in the paper;
  - (b) the gathering of labour market intelligence and sector skills analysis in 2007/08;
  - (c) the preparation of a scoping paper to the Strategy Committee on the 'Safe Ground' project;
  - (d) the resources for the first year and
  - (e) support in principle for the resources for the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> years of the project. Formal approval would need to be based on confirmation of the DCS Annual Plan in subsequent years.

<b>Action: Technical Director</b>
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<b>Action: Technical Director</b>
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## 7 PRIORITY SITES - STAFF GUIDANCE & EXIT STRATEGIES

**Paper: 283/6**

- 7.1 The meeting considered a paper presenting DCS's staff Guidance for dealing with Natural Heritage sites and Public Safety sites. The Board noted that exit strategies had now been included in the guidance.
- 7.2 Members also **noted** that the draft DCS Guidance contained in the paper had been discussed both at the Deer Management Committee (at their meeting on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2006) and, in relation to exit strategies, by the Strategy Committee (at their meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> November 2006). It was further **noted** that the Deer Management Committee recommended presentation of the Guidance to the Board for Approval. In addition, the Strategy Committee had recommended that a revised paper on exit strategies be presented to the Board for approval and the exit strategy changes incorporated into the Guidance.
- 7.3 The meeting was advised that DCS Guidance on Natural Heritage sites and Public Safety sites would remain a dynamic document and, should the need arise to deviate from the agreed procedures, the DCS Chairman would advise and recommend the level of further Board involvement needed.
- 7.4 The paper provided examples of various exit points.

7.5 During the meeting, the process to apply when an individual did not want to develop their land to meet relevant targets and retain the status quo was discussed. Members were advised that staff were in discussions with Scottish Natural Heritage on this issue and **agreed** that the Technical Director report back to the next meeting.

Action:  
Technical  
Director

7.6 Following discussion, Members **approved** the exit points as provided in the paper.

Action:  
Technical  
Director

7.7 In addition, and subject to minor amendments, Members **approved** the Staff Guidance.

Action:  
Technical  
Director

7.8 Members also **agreed** that the Chairman be consulted in the first instance with regard to any future amendments to the Staff Guidance.

Action:  
Technical  
Director

## 8 PRIORITY SITES – REMOVAL OF SITES FROM LIST Paper: 283/7

8.1 The paper before the meeting sought the Board's formal approval to remove 2 priority sites from the DCS Work Programme as recommended by the Deer Management Committee.

8.2 The meeting **noted** that the Deer Management Committee, at their meeting on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2006, reviewed progress on sites within the DCS work programme including all sites relating to Natural Heritage or Public Safety. The Committee had agreed that the following sites be removed from the Priority Sites Process:

### (a) Flow Country Site For Assessment

Herbivore impacts were generally considered to be at levels which were compatible with the objectives of the Natura and SSSI interests within the open ground area of the Flow Country Site for Assessment.

There was not sufficient evidence for DCS to conclude deer have caused damage to the woodlands within this site. The information which has been collected would be used to aid and inform appropriate cull levels for the current management grant package between FCS and the Woodland managers.

### (b) A838 Lairg to Laxford Bridge

From analysing available records over the last 5 years and collecting information on collisions, there were only 6 recorded incidents of accidents involving deer over this 35 mile stretch of road from Lairg to Laxford Bridge. Most of the road was single track, so vehicle speed and traffic volume were not a significant factor in contributing to deer related RTA's.

There had been one reported accident on this road in the last 12 months.

- 8.3 Following consideration, the Board formally **approved** the removal of the above mentioned sites from the DCS work programme and **noted** that as part of the exit strategy, DCS would write to all those involved to inform them of DCS' decision..

Action:  
Technical  
Director

**9 DCS PROCEDURES FOR THE ISSUING MOVEMENT AND USE OF FIREARMS Paper: 283/8**

- 9.1 The purpose of the paper before the meeting was to provide the Board with an opportunity to comment on proposed procedures for the issuing of firearms, their use and movement, following the move to Great Glen House. Members were asked to consider and approve the attached proposed DCS Firearm Procedures with associated sample Firearms Authority and Movement Sheet.
- 9.2 Members were advised that the draft procedures had been prepared by staff, with advice from Dr Colin Shedden. The procedures ensure that DCS staff comply with legislation, have a record of the number of shots fired by each firearm, that the appropriate authority had been given for the use of firearms by technical staff and that the Technical Director and Operations Manager knew where the firearms were being used. The procedures, once approved, would be publicly available.
- 9.3 During discussion, Members agreed that the procedures be amended to include:
- (a) a process for providing an external audit of the procedures to be introduced.
  - (b) clarity that ammunition being stored in gun cabinets would be stored in a separate locked compartment.
  - (c) a requirement for 2 members of staff to be present when multiple firearms were being transported between the armoury and the gunsmiths or point of purchase sale.
  - (d) the firearms movement sheets to include a section detailing the time when firearms ammunition are issued and returned.
- 9.4 Subject to the inclusion of the amendments referred to in paragraph Members **approved** the procedures for the issuing, movement and use of firearms.

Action:  
Technical  
Director

Action:  
Technical  
Director

**10 DCS CO-LOCATION TO GREAT GLEN HOUSE Paper: 283/9**

- 10.1 The purpose of the paper before the meeting was to provide Members with an update on the most significant events around DCS' HQ co-location to Great Glen House; and to report two significant outstanding matters for Members to discuss.
- 10.2 Members were also advised that there were 2 significant matters remain outstanding. These were:

## **1 Storage of Equipment**

Discussions continue with SNH about how to accommodate DCS' operational equipment. To date, SNH had agreed to convert three storage areas into a secure equipment store for firearms and the items currently stored in the basement at Knowsley. They were about to submit plans to the Highland Council for the necessary consents and, all going well, the equipment should be moved by the end of March. This would result in an improvement on the space and working environment for these items compared to Knowsley.

The vehicles, towables and some larger equipment presented more of a challenge as Great Glen House were unable to accommodate all of these on site, as was the case at Knowsley. DCS had negotiated the construction of garages over 6 parking spaces in the secure compound at Great Glen House for DCS. This will operate as a holding area for equipment arriving and departing, and for the storage of some items, with the remaining items stored off site. DCS were currently investigating options for the off-site storage, looking first at any capacity in other Government properties nearby. This may lead to other efficiencies in relation to maintenance and sharing equipment.

Overall, whilst this arrangement did not meet all that the Board agreed, it was workable; an improvement in some areas on the arrangements at Knowsley; and represented a significant compromise for both SNH and DCS in sharing a building that was not designed with major field operations in mind.

## **2 Costs associated with DCS occupation at Great Glen House**

The running costs of the building for DCS should be finalised before the start of the next financial year. It is estimated that the cost implications would at least be neutral; and the co-location gives DCS the opportunity to make other efficiency savings, eg use of video conferencing and sharing contracts with SNH.

DCS would review the cost implications of the move as part of the Board's on-going responsibility to achieve Best Value for public money to enable the Board to judge whether the move had achieved the improvements in effectiveness, efficiencies and economy which formed the basis of the business decision to co-locate. It is proposed that a full review of costs be presented to the Board in September 2007.

10.3 Members were advised that overall, and notwithstanding the outstanding matters, the move had been positive to date, with the benefits to DCS outweighing the drawbacks. Members were also advised that from a strategic perspective, the move had raised DCS' profile with many important influencers and decision makers, not least the First Minister. DCS willingness to co-locate, and the strong visual presence of DCS at Great Glen House, had sent out strong positive messages about DCS as an active and forward-looking part of Government.

- 10.4 During discussions, members were assured that DCS Management Team continued to monitor the effect the move had had on staff.
- 10.5 Members discussed and **noted** the proposals for storage of equipment as outlined in the paper.
- 10.6 Members **noted** the importance of reviewing the implications of the move and agreed that the report to the Board at their meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> September 2007 should consider this in its widest context, and not just focus on cost.

<b>Action: Director</b>
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## 11 **JOINT WORKING FOR GOVERNMENT NATURE CONSERVATION TARGETS** **Paper: 283/10**

- 11.1 The Technical Director presented a paper explaining the challenges and issues for DCS with assisting in the delivery of the Government's Nature Conservation targets. The Scottish Executive's target is for 80% of features on designated sites to be in favourable or recovering condition by March 2008 and the British Government's target is 95% by March 2010.
- 11.2 The Board **noted** the importance of this work for DCS, the role of Members in helping to promote an understanding of the Joint Working process to key stakeholders and the potential implications for sustainable deer management over wider areas.
- 11.3 Members were reminded that originally DCS had developed a Priority Site Process with three key stages: Expression of Concern, Site for Assessment and Priority Site. The majority of sites on the current DCS work programme originated through this route. However, more recently under Joint Working arrangements DCS, SNH, FCS and SEERAD had sought to develop a process of prioritising work loads based on Site Condition Monitoring. Sites that had originated from both processes were currently on the DCS work programme. It was **noted** that further discussions were taking place within a Joint Agency Programme Team on the most effective and efficient way to address the SE targets within these programmes. The paper highlighted the processes that were in place, the areas where thinking was developing and the resource implications for DCS.
- 11.4 The Board **noted**:
- (a) the importance of the work in the context of key government targets,
  - (b) the role that they as members had in helping to promote an understanding of the Joint Working process to key stakeholders,
  - (c) the role of various web sites in making information available to a wide range of stakeholders and
  - (d) that the grouping of designated sites into areas for action could have significant implications for sustainable deer management over wider areas.

- 11.5 During discussions on communication, it was **agreed** that the reasons why designated sites were included in the Risk Register had to be transparent. This should include all relevant information about the site such as Natura, deer and sheep issues.
- 11.6 Members were advised that the next stage of the process would consider resource implications.
- 11.7 Members were further informed that this issue would be discussed further by the Deer Management Committee at their meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> January 2007.

<b>Action: Technical Director</b>
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**12      PROGRESS UPDATE ON CAENLOCHAN CULL                      Paper: 283/11**

- 12.1 Members were provided with an update on progress with the cull and provision of DCS assistance on the Caenlochan cull.
- 12.2 It was **noted** that DCS has received advice from DEFRA through the Executive that there was in their view no need to seek state aids clearance and, hence, DCS would not be required to recover venison receipts if an agreement is reached with the estates under section 12 with DCS providing assistance.
- 12.3 Members were advised that DCS assistance to estates was presently being provided under Section 10/11 whilst the final hurdles to the use of Section 12 are resolved. One of these hurdles was the need to seek the approval of Ministers not to recover the expenses of the operation. This was outstanding and the action current rests with SEERAD.
- 12.4 It was **noted** that DCS Board approval for the proposal of assistance to support culling operations in the Caenlochan Section 7 area was given by e-mail on the 15<sup>th</sup> November 2006. The Board had agreed to the assistance being provided on the following basis:
- Efficient use of public funds:
  - Best Practice being followed:
  - Overall target density was achieved and
  - Estates were flexible in terms of cull targets for each estate in order to deliver the target density in the section 7 area.
- 12.5 Members were advised that three DCS members of staff were deployed on the ground on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2006.
- 12.6 The meeting **noted** that a Section 7 Steering Group meeting was held on 1<sup>st</sup> December to review progress with the cull and Members were provided a report on the cull to date.
- 12.7 Members were informed that DCS was providing a weekly cull diary on its website providing up-to-date information about the operation. In addition, a Question and Answer document would be circulated to staff and Board members along with a briefing paper about the cull to ensure the relevant information was circulated clearly and concisely. A summary briefing would be circulated to Board Members and staff on a monthly basis unless specific issues

arose which in themselves merit additional briefings. These would be circulated by email.

12.8 A meeting had also been held with senior management at Glenshee Ski Resort to inform them of details of the culling operation. This had established a communication channel with DCS. Contact would also be made with community councils in the area surrounding the cull area. Similar contact would be made with Braemar Tourism Committee/Group.

12.9 Members **noted** the position.

### 13 EFFICIENT GOVERNMENT

**Paper: 283/12**

13.1 The purpose of the paper before the meeting was to update Members of developments in the Efficient Government agenda and of some of the possible implications for DCS in the medium term.

13.2 The meeting was advised that DCS's main visible contribution to the Efficient Government agenda was through the move to Great Glen House. However, there were a wide range of other initiatives under this broad banner which were likely to have an impact on DCS. Many of these were being co-ordinated by Ms. Tracey Slaven through SEERAD's 'On the Ground' programme.

13.3 The following list of potential items which were currently on the horizon and particularly relevant to DCS included:

- Trial areas for deeper joined up working between members of the ERAD family, particularly in the way they deal with customers as well as at a regional planning level, and to begin to integrate more closely with community planning. The areas in the frame at the moment were Dumfries and Galloway, and one of the National Parks.
- Co-location of offices in the Stirling area was being considered and there may be opportunities for DCS to benefit from these arrangements, either when DCS's current lease expires in May 2008, or sooner.
- A joint approach to measuring the impact of Agencies' environmental policies. There was a strong logic to a common approach to measuring the ERAD family's impact on the environment in the same way.
- A Memorandum of Understanding between the Scottish Executive and NDPBs in dealing with Freedom of Information requests.
- A more comprehensive listing of advice and incentives available to land managers. SEERAD currently publish a list of grants and services which they provide to farmers. The ERAD family is discussing whether to broaden this leaflet to include other customers and grants/services provided by other bodies, eg authorisation to shoot deer out of season or at night.

- The gradual realignment of area-based activity across the ERAD family to 13 areas across Scotland but subject to meeting the specific needs of Agencies.
- Equality. Ministers had a commitment to report every 3 years on progress throughout the public sector, not just Government departments. Consequently, members of the ERAD family were beginning to consider a joined up recording system.

13.4 Members noted progress to date.

## 14 MINUTES OF MEETINGS

### a) Deer Management Committee

**Draft Minutes of meeting held 31<sup>st</sup> October 2006 Paper: 283/13**

14.1 The meeting considered the draft Minutes of the Deer Management Committee meeting held on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2006.

14.2 The draft minutes were noted.

### b) Strategy Committee

**Draft Minutes of meeting held 14<sup>th</sup> November 2006**

**Paper: 283/14**

14.3 The meeting considered the draft Minutes of the Strategy Committee meeting held on 14<sup>th</sup> November 2006.

14.4 The draft minutes were noted.

### c) Resources & Audit Committee

**Draft minutes of meeting held 14<sup>th</sup> November 2006**

**Paper: 283/15**

14.5 The meeting considered the draft Minutes of the Resources and Audit Committee meeting held on 14<sup>th</sup> November 2006.

14.6 The draft minutes were noted.

## 15 EXTERNAL MEETINGS ATTENDED

**Paper: 283/16**

15.1 Members noted the contents of the paper detailing external meetings attended, and to be attended, by the Chairman, Director and Technical Director.

## 16 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

16.1 There was no other business.

## 17 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

17.1 The next meeting of the Board will be held in Great Glen House, Inverness on 7<sup>th</sup> March 2007.