

Minutes of the 285th Meeting of the Deer Commission for Scotland held in Dunkeld House Hotel, Dunkeld on Tuesday, 12th June 2007

OPEN SESSION

Present: Prof J Milne (Chairman)
Dr C Shedden
Dr A Barbour
Mr A Hamilton
Dr S Walker
Prof J Pemberton
Mr S Pepper
Mr N Rowantree
Earl of Dalhousie
Sir Michael Strang Steel

Mr N Halfhide (Chief Executive)
Mr R Edwards (Head of Admin)
Mr E Barclay (Communications Officer)
Mr R Kernahan (Interim Head of Joint Working)
Mr A MacGugan (Interim Head of Operations & Best Practice)
Mr H Trench (Interim Head of Strategy)
Mr P Kirk (Deer Officer)
Mr I Hope (Deer Officer)
Mr. D Fraser (Deer Officer)

Mr C McClean, CNPA
Mr R Burton, SNH

OPENING REMARKS

- 1 The Chairman welcomed all present to the meeting. There was 1 member of the public in attendance.

There were apologies from Dr P Mayhew, Mr D Doxford (SEERAD) and Mr R Dunsmore (FCS).

- 2 **DRAFT MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 7TH MARCH 2007** Paper: 285/1

The Minutes were approved.

- 3 **MATTERS ARISING FROM MEETING HELD ON 7TH MARCH 2007** Paper: 285/2

- 3.1 Under paragraph 6.9, staff noted that the Deer Commission for Scotland (DCS) had considered the cost effectiveness of hiring rather than purchasing vehicles 4-5 years ago. Staff also noted that they were currently discussing the possibility of sharing vehicles and maintenance contracts with Scottish Natural Heritage and Forestry Commission Scotland.

- 3.2 It was noted that a paper on Red Deer refugia would be discussed by the Deer Management Committee at their next meeting in August.

3.3 Members **noted** the contents of Paper 285/2.

4 JOINT WORKING

Paper: 285/3

4.1 The Head of Joint Working introduced this paper which provided Members with an update on the Joint Working Process and highlighted the key issues where further work was ongoing. He noted that approximately 70% of the features on designated sites are in favourable condition.

4.2 During the discussion, Members expressed concern that some land managers were not fully aware of the process and its consequences for their land. Staff recognised that communication remained a significant challenge even though all owners have now been advised of the sites on their land which had failed the monitoring process.

4.3 Members were advised that a 'flyer' explaining the joint working process, and referred to as Annex 2 in the paper, was being finalised and would be available for issue at the Game Fairs.

4.4 Following discussion, Members:

- **noted** the current work programme and the progress made by DCS towards meeting the Government's Nature Conservation targets;
- **noted** funding assistance from SNH for the additional work in 2007-08;
- **agreed** the allocation of additional expenditure and extra targets within the Annual Plan to assist the Joint Working Process; and
- **delegated** authority to the Deer Management Committee to monitor DCS' contributions to the Joint Working process and progress towards the 2008 and 2010 Nature Conservation targets.

5 SCOTTISH RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME (SRDP) Paper: 285/4

5.1 The Head of Strategy introduced the paper, providing an overview of implementation of the SRDP and the DCS's engagement in the process and the resource implications.

5.2 Members **noted** that, from a DCS perspective, there appeared to be three key areas around which to focus effort. These were:

- Informing the setting of regional priorities and ensuring sufficient information about deer management issues is available to those identifying the priorities;
- Ensuring deer management issues are adequately addressed in proposals where relevant; and
- Ensuring DCS' stakeholders are aware of the opportunities within Rural Development Contracts (both deer specific and wider business development)

5.3 Members discussed the need to inform interested parties of the new Programme, and whether they needed to register under IACS. Staff

Action: Head of Strategy

reported that a Communications Plan for the SRDP was in place and that this included a website portal. Members **agreed** that staff would circulate information to the Board as it became available.

5.4 Following discussion, Members **agreed** that DCS should:

- contribute to the guidance for identifying priorities and influencing priorities and
- contribute technical advice to the assessment of proposals where relevant.

5.5 Members **agreed** that the Strategy Committee of the Board assist in shaping the guidance.

Action:
Head of
Strategy

6 DMQ LIMITED

Paper: 285/5

6.1 The Head of Best Practice and Operations introduced the paper, seeking agreement from Members on continuing support of DCS for DMQ Ltd.

6.2 Following discussion, Members:

- **confirmed** that DCS was supportive of current deer sector initiatives that reinforce standards and encourage the demonstration of competence, including Deer Stalking Certificates (DSC) Level I & II, and that DCS should continue to provide appropriate guidance and technical input to these initiatives;
- **agreed** that DCS remain a member of DMQ Ltd and periodically review this position;
- **agreed** that DCS should increase its level of support to DMQ Ltd through seeking membership of the Quality Assurance Group; and
- **agreed** that DCS seek a meeting with the DMQ Ltd Board in September 2007 to reassure them of DCS' continuing support.

Action: Head
of Operations
/Best Practice

7 RECOGNISING GOOD PRACTICE IN LAND MANAGEMENT Paper: 285/6

7.1 The Head of Strategy introduced the paper, updating Members on development of the concept of 'safe ground' and proposing a way forward.

7.2 During discussion, Members made the following points:

- this proposal needs to be linked with existing schemes;
- the deer industry would need to be involved at a later stage to explore their views and be clear what would motivate them to change their management;
- there were possible parallels with the UK Woodland Assurance Scheme as an example of a Government supported kite mark;
- Best Practice was a useful delivery tool in this process; and
- Implementation could take place at different levels.

7.3 Members **agreed** that DCS seek to hold exploratory talks with Forestry Commission Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage, the National Park

Action:
Head of
Strategy

Authorities and the Scottish Executive to consider a cross-sector approach to recognising good practice in land management.

8 CORPORATE PLAN Paper: 285/7

- 8.1 The Chief Executive introduced the paper, setting out the process and timetable for developing the Deer Commission for Scotland's Corporate Plan for 2008-11.
- 8.2 Following discussion, Members **agreed** the process and timetable for developing the Corporate Plan for 2008-11, and **noted** the new Strategic Guidance issued by the Scottish Executive to DCS.

9 DRAFT ABSTRACT OF ACCOUNTS FOR 2006/07 Paper: 285/8

- 9.1 The Head of Administration introduced the paper, presenting Members with the draft Abstract of the Income and Expenditure of DCS for the financial year ending 31st March 2007 as recommended by the Resources and Audit Committee.
- 9.2 Members **approved** the draft 'Abstract of Accounts'.

10 REVISED BUDGET FOR 2007/08 Paper: 285/9

- 10.1 The Chief Executive introduced the paper; presenting Members with a revised budget for 2007/08 and outlining the additional steps the Senior Management Team had put in place to manage spend.
- 10.2 Members **noted** that the budget included the costs of those invoices not deducted from the Commission's budget for 2006/07 (totalling £29,166.88) and that colleagues within the Scottish Executive had advised DCS to include these within its revision of the budget in the autumn.
- 10.3 Members queried the rules on the purchase of larder equipment in the Unified Data Collection project.
- 10.4 Staff advised Members that they were preparing a list of desirable items should extra funding become available during the year.
- 10.5 The Chairman alerted Members that parts of the media had shown interest in the helicopter contract that had been issued to tender. Members **noted** that this was a joint tender by DCS and Scottish Natural Heritage and covered estimated helicopter use over the next 3 years.
- 10.6 Following discussion Members **agreed** the revised profile for the 2007/08 budget as recommended by the Resources and Audit Committee and **noted** the following additional measures to improve budget management:

Action: Head of Strategy

- Corporate responsibility for meeting the 2% spending target;
- Clear lines of responsibility for delivering individual actions with the Annual Business Plan and the resources associated with them;
- Sharper business prioritisation;
- More frequent monitoring of progress against the monthly spend profile;
- Closer and more frequent liaison with staff to share information and ownership of the budget; and
- Tighter project management systems and training, with particular focus on strategically important areas of DCS' business.

11 ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2006/07 Paper: 285/10

11.1 The Chief Executive introduced the paper to promote discussion about how best to present the activities of DCS in their Annual Report for 2006/07.

11.2 During discussion, Members **agreed** that the Annual Plan for 2006/07 should:

- Be structured around those outcomes agreed at the start of the year;
- Illustrate how the activities of DCS contribute to the new Government's strategic objectives;
- Include DCS' achievement of environmental targets;
- Report on work with other agencies and stakeholders, and what this has achieved;
- Describe the state of the national and regional deer populations, making clear the limitations of the existing data; and
- Translate the Chairman's Foreword into Gaelic.

11.3 Members **noted** that staff would now draw up an outline of the Annual Report and begin drafting. This work will be led by the Communications Officer with input from the Chief Executive and other members of staff.

<p>Action: Chief Executive/ Coms Officer</p>

12 STRATEGY FOR WILD DEER - PROGRESS REPORT Paper: 285/11

12.1 The Head of Strategy introduced the paper, providing Members with an update on progress on the Strategy for Wild Deer.

12.2 Members **noted** progress to date and the schedule over the coming three months.

13 CAENLOCHAN - CULL REPORT Paper: 285/12

13.1 Donald Fraser introduced the paper, updating Members on progress at Caenlochan in 2006-07.

13.2 Members discussed DCS' role in the 2006-07 culling operation and **agreed** that DCS had made an efficient use of public funds in its actions.

13.3 Members **noted**:

- the review of the culling operations at Caenlochan in 2006 – 07 as attached at Annex 1 of the paper;
- that DCS would continue to seek, through the Section 7 Steering Group and through provision of advisory cull targets, the summer deer density set out in the section 7 agreement; and
- that DCS would review this approach following a review and analysis of the Habitat Monitoring data in August 2007.

13.4 Members thanked staff for their efforts and their professionalism during the operation.

14 DCS STORAGE

Paper: 285/13

14.1 The Head of Best Practice and Operations introduced the paper, updating Members on the provision of storage for equipment owned by DCS.

14.2 Members **noted** that:

- Scottish Natural Heritage had agreed to meet the cost of building a new storage shed to be erected on the Longman site;
- DCS would retain ownership of the storage shed;
- with funding now agreed, planning arrangements could now proceed for the building of the storage shed with a completion date of November 2007.
- Conversion of the store, gun room and wet bay had been completed at Great Glen House and equipment would be transferred on receipt of the final building warrant and
- final relocation of vehicles and kit would be completed by November 2007.

15 EXTERNAL MEETINGS ATTENDED BY CHAIRMAN AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Paper: 285/14

Members **noted** the contents of the paper detailing external meetings attended, and to be attended, by the Chairman and Chief Executive.

16 MINUTES OF MEETINGS

a) Deer Management Committee

Draft Minutes of meeting held 1st May 2007

Paper: 285/15

16.1 Members **noted** the draft Minutes of the Deer Management Committee meeting held on 1st May 2007.

16.2 Staff advised Members of the discussions that took place at the meeting in relation to (a) Deer on Barra and (b) the Next Steps projects.

b) Strategy Committee

Draft Minutes of meeting held 8th May 2007

Paper: 285/16

16.3 Members **noted** the draft Minutes of the Strategy Committee meeting held on 8th May 2007.

c) Resources & Audit Committee
Draft minutes of meeting held 8th May 2007 **Paper: 285/17**

16.4 Members **noted** the draft Minutes of the Resources and Audit Committee meeting held on 8th May 2007.

17 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

18 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Board will be held at Loch Melfort, Argyll on 24th/25th September 2007.