

Deer Management in Scotland; Report to the Scottish Government from Scottish Natural Heritage

Statement from Scottish Environment LINK



Duncan Orr-Ewing, Chair of the LINK Deer Task Force said:

“We welcome the work of SNH and the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee of the Scottish Parliament in conducting such a thorough review of the deer management approach in Scotland. This is long overdue.

This report underlines the damage caused by high deer numbers. It marks an important step forward towards a progressive new approach to deer management that will benefit the many and not just the few.

SNH should take advantage of new powers to require forward culling plans from land owners, and should be given clearer powers to endorse culls to ensure that they are adequate to protect the public interest. These are relatively modest changes, which would build on current voluntary and collaborative deer management approaches, and which would however create the required conditions for the necessary “step change” to take effect. SNH should receive additional resources to put the required planning and data management systems in place to inform sustainable management. All data should be available in an easily accessible format on the SNH website and made available to relevant stakeholders.”

Notes

High populations of deer in many parts of Scotland are causing significant damage to protected areas, native woodlands, and peatlands, through browsing and trampling. Deer damage to public interests is a major impediment to Scottish Government in relation to a number of public policy targets for improvements to protected nature conservation areas; woodland expansion; and tackling climate change. Tackling the issue of unsustainable deer management is important in meeting Aichi and Scottish Biodiversity Strategy 2020 targets.

In the absence of natural predators of deer, effective management measures need to be in place to keep deer populations at sustainable levels. At the moment an undue burden of deer management falls on the Forestry Commission (and therefore the public) as they take one third of the national deer cull each year. There are also other costs to the public from high deer numbers including deer fencing, vehicle collisions, and impacts on agricultural crops and private gardens. We need more private landowners to help by maintaining deer populations at sustainable levels, whilst LINK also recognises a sporting interest.

This SNH Review highlights that whilst some progress has been made with improvements to deer management planning, there is still a substantial amount of work to do to ensure that these plans are

implemented, and that gaps in the voluntary deer management network are filled, particularly in lowland Scotland. The Review highlights slow progress with existing section 7 voluntary control orders under the Deer (Scotland) Act 1996, and section 8 compulsory control orders have never been used.

The Land Reform Act 2015 included increased powers to SNH to promote sustainable deer management in the public interest. Further action has been promised by Scottish Government on deer management if this SNH Review did not show “a step change in the delivery of effective deer management”.

We believe that this review does highlight some progress in the right direction, however it indicates that the rate of change is not fast enough to achieve the targets set out in the Scottish Biodiversity Route Map to 2020. The time has now come to develop and promote a modern, evidence based management system of wild deer fit for the 21st century, and capable of responding to the changing environment.

To this end we believe that Scottish Natural Heritage should have increased powers to not only require advance deer cull information from individual landowners (provided in the Land Reform Act 2016) but also to have the powers to endorse such cull targets. This modest change would build on the current progress with Deer Management Planning and would help promote further collaborative and sustainable deer management in the public interest. The voluntary approach to deer management would remain largely intact. SNH should receive additional resources to put the required planning and data management systems in place to inform sustainable management. All data should be available in an easily accessible format and we suggest a similar portal to the FCS “public register” for Forest Design Planning and new woodland plantings.

Supported by;

RSPB Scotland

National Trust for Scotland

Scottish Wildlife Trust

Woodland Trust Scotland

Ramblers Scotland

Trees for Life

John Muir Trust (not LINK affiliated)

Duncan Orr-Ewing, Chair LINK Deer Task Force

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