**Caenlochan Section 7 Agreement**

**Monday 23rd October 2023 @1030 in Glenisla Hall**

**Meeting minutes**

**Present:**

Colin Macphail (Chair) NatureScot

Jamie Gammell Alrick

Nicholas Gibb Glenisla House

Jason Williamson Auchavan & Glencally

Angus MacNicol Invercauld Glenshee & Glencallater

Richard Gledson & Chris Walker Bachnagairn (Balmoral)

John Thomson & Kevin Peters FLS – Glenprosen & GlenDoll

Mark Mitchell Bell Ingram (Glenhead/ Damph)

Doug McAdam SGDMG Chair

Deirdre Stewart SGDMG Secretary/ Treasurer

Graeme Taylor & Jimmy Irvine NatureScot

Mike Cottam CNPA

**Apologies:**

Andrew Reid (Glencallater)

Liam Donald (Glenshee)

Gary Coutts (Bachnagairn)

Bill Mearns & Florian Kuehnle (Tulchan)

Thom Wells (Clova & Balnaboth)

Bruce Cooper (Glenhead / Damph)

James Davidson (Alrick)

Archie Bennett (Auchavan & Glencally)

Major John Gibb (Glenisla House)

1. **Welcome and apologies**

CM welcomed all to the meeting and requested apologies (as above).

1. **Review June 2023 Minutes & Action Points**

GT highlighted two comments received on the minutes from the meeting on the 12th June 2023:

* The minutes did not cover the depth of conversation on the cull updates & trigger points that were discussed in the meeting. This is to be further addressed in agenda item 5.
* There had been a request to investigate what funding is available for helping cover the DMG costs that have been incurred with signing the Section 7 and for ongoing further DMG work related to the Section 7 or wider DMG work. GT answered that there is no addition direct pot of money from NatureScot. SGDMG could apply for a number of public finding schemes for biodiversity projects, some of which suach as NRF could support group costs for biodiversity projects. MC stated that in terms of CNPA funding the delivery phase application for funding for Heritage Horizons has been applied for and this may allow a possible route for additional funding for the DMG.
* JI also highlighted the error with the FLS cull targets for Prosen & Glendoll being against the wrong properties. This was a transposition error not affecting overall culls.

AP1: CNPA have been invited to attend and MC is present. Discharged

AP2: GT circulated the minutes of the Feb 2023 S7 signing meeting. Discharged

**AP3:** JI has started to gather cull information for the wider SGDMG area and for properties out with the SGDMG area. Discussed further under agenda item 6.

**AP4:** GT shared the SCM result for species rich grassland. Full report is currently going through the internal NatureScot QA process. Discussed further under agenda item 7.

AP5: ongoing – Invercauld & Balmoral to share HIA information with NatureScot. NatureScot to request from other properties for HIA results.

**AP6:** JI started a fortnightly deer cull report for the stags, sharing information with the stalkers and periodically with the wider S7 group. request also started to include the wider SGDMG properties. This is working well in sharing the information between all parties. Further discussion on this in agenda item 5.

AP7: GT circulated final version of the Section 7 agreement. Discharged

1. **Stag Cull Report**

Signatories provided updated deer cull figures at the meeting. JI summarised the information that up to the 22nd October there was a reported cull of 632 stags, 58 hinds & 53 calves for within the S7 area, with cull updates from 3 properties required. Cull target for stags will be delivered and exceeded.

1. **Hind Cull Targets 2023/24**

An overall Section 7 hind cull target of 810 hinds. All properties have stated hind culls with a balance of 68 left as unallocated at present. No signatories present indicated they would be willing, at this stage to increase their culls to cover the shortfall in NatureScot requested hind culls 23/24. This unallocated amount will be worked on depending on the location of hinds throughout the winter.

There was some discussion that as a result of the stag cull target being exceeded then can this result in less hinds being culled – i.e. overall cull numbers are delivered. GT & JI stated that this was not suitable and that given this is a reduction cull then the delivery of the hind cull target is key. There is some concerns that the hinds are not present on a number of estates and therefore current hind culls may be difficult to deliver. Overall the hind cull needs delivered and the weekly reporting and feedback will provide a clearer picture on where hinds are presently. If required NatureScot staff can provide assistance on better informing where hinds are presently, with the ability to carry out basic counts/ checks as felt needed.

Signatories raised concerns about the lack of cull targets/ clarity on the wider SGDMG area. JI has agreed to gather wider cull target information for the remaining SGDMG area and for properties south of Glenisla/ Mount Blair and circulate with the weekly reporting.

There was further discussion around whether the wider properties hind cull delivery will assist towards the Section 7 hind cull allocation. Neither NatureScot nor SGDMG have gathered cull targets for hinds for properties out with the Section 7 area. Further clarity on what the overall required SGDMG hind cull target is required? JI/ GT stated if hard winter weather or culling activity results in hinds moving off the Section 7 area then this will need monitored and factored in to the overall cull target delivery. These movements could, again be checked by census.

The group thanked NatureScot staff for collating information on culls and circulating to the steering group.

1. **Hind Cull Reporting Frequency & Review Points**

JI will request cull information from the Section 7 area, wider SGDMG properties on a weekly basis and circulate around the contacts. JI will update the spreadsheet to show zonal culls & include cull targets for all properties out with the S7 area. The properties to the south of Glenisla/ Mount Blair will be requested to share cull info.

There was discussion around potential review dates for consideration of when the S7 cull was on track. GT stated that NatureScot could consider a minimum cull of 200 hinds per month as a sensible indicator. DS suggested that properties should be encouraged to front load the hind cull prior to Christmas to ensure there is no slippage in the delivery of the cull target, this may be 60% by Christmas. The risk was with signatories in terms of any slippage.

KP asked what action NatureScot can take on properties who are harbouring deer. GT ran through various options – both regulatory & voluntary. Section 8 is a potential and this can be done against an individual property if required. It was agreed that by providing the weekly cull reports will assist delivery of culls and also should help remove any lag in concerns of lack of culling being raised.

It was suggested that a weekly/ fortnightly VC meeting for JI & stalkers to discuss deer movements/ location during the next 4 months could assist. JI will contact stalkers to gauge opinion on the possibility of this, but the very least that will be requested is an idea of number of deer seen on individual properties each week whilst submitting cull info.

AM stated that Invercauld staff were available to assist with deer culling on other properties if required.

NG highlighted that Glenisla House have agreed with some assistance from NatureScot for the culling of hinds.

CW raised frustrations that some key access through FLS Glendoll is still blocked after Storm Arwen in December 2021. There has been ongoing requests to have this cleared, but this has not been actioned yet.

1. **Cull and population information from outwith Section 7 Area.**

JI summarised what limited information had been provided to date as a result of statutory annual cull return requests. There is still some missing property gaps which to the south of Glenisla/ Mount Blair that JI will continue to work on. Cull information returned to date has shown a mixed picture, with more generally more stags than hinds being culled, although larger herds of hinds are being seen to the south of the Section 7 area.

JGammell, DM raised concerns about the lack of deer management information that NatureScot hold on this area. Limited cull information has been received, no cull targets and no population information. SGDMG do not hold this information.

JI has agreed to consider options for carrying out a count/ survey of the area south of Mount Blair to Kilry to help inform the wider deer management picture.

There was discussion around the extent of the Section 7 area and whether this needs increased to include additional properties. Signatories reminded NatureScot staff that the “Steering Group shall keep the boundary under review and may recommend to NatureScot that the control area be expanded” GT highlighted that any extension is not easily considered with regards to delivery of the designated site impacts and would have implications for the density targets. GT stated that whilst the focus is on the wider SGDMG or ‘south properties’ the consideration of extension could also cover properties to the North and East of SGDMG. JI suggested that the inclusion of any properties in a Section 7 is not the only route to ensure better collaboration between the S7 and adjacent land holdings.

On the back of further information provided by the cull target requests/ deer count info then there will be more complete picture on whether an extension is required or not. This work is ongoing.

It was agreed that the wider SGDMG and additional identified contacts should be invited to attend the next Section 7 meeting.

1. **SCM results**

GT covered the circulated Montane Acid Grassland Site Condition Monitoring result sheet. Whilst NatureScot had circulated the result of SCM cycle 4 assessment of Montane Acid Grassland on the Caenlochan and Garbh Choire SSSIs with Corrie Fee NNR in the east there was not as yet a completed report which would provide detailed information and management advice and therefore GT would provide a verbal update on this. The draft report was currently undertaking quality assurance and would be available to signatories as soon as possible.

Site Condition monitoring is on indication of overall feature health and whilst the Section 7 agreement mentions SCM surveys, there are no targets associated with SCM results. Habitat targets within the Section 7 are based on herbivore impact. SCM results in the past SCM cycles have varied, last results were favourable maintained.

In terms of the work carried out and the implication of this, fieldwork was carried out on 29 September and 4 and 13 October 2022 as well as 5th May 2023. 18 plots were visited, which is a small number, however enough to conclude on implications on feature condition. Of those plots visited five of six samples in moss, sedge and rush-heaths in the west of the SAC, in particular all four on Glas Maol, failed as they did not meet all targets, due to the high cover of fine grasses. Of the other two further plots on the western tops/plateau, one in moss-heath to the south of Garbh Choire, met all targets and the other in rush-heath on the southern shoulder of Carn of Claise, marginally failed the fine grasses target. Eight samples were located in grass-heath, all targets were met. Due to the number of failures for the cover of fine grasses/Galium saxatile in the Glas Maol area, more than 10% of the Caenlochan’s moss, sedge and rush-heaths probably have too high a cover of fine grasses and heath bedstraw and are, therefore, collectively unfavourable. Long-term overgrazing may have increased the cover of fine grasses and associated species that are more tolerant of grazing and trampling.

1. **DONM Meeting**

4th December 2023 via a video conference (most likely teams).

1. **AOB**

No other discussion points were raised.

AP1: JI to request and share weekly cull updates for the Section 7 area, SGDMG area. Update spreadsheet to show zonal culls & also % of hind cull delivery.

AP2: JI to continue to gather deer management information for the area south of Glenisla/ Mount Blair. Mapping & contact information.

AP3: NatureScot & SGDMG to invite wider properties to the next Section 7 meeting.

AP4: NatureScot to circulate the finalised SCM report.

AP5: Invercauld and Balmoral to share most recent HIA data with NatureScot. NatureScot to request any other outstanding data from SGDMG members.

AP6: NatureScot to carry out small scale deer census over properties south of Glenisla/ Mount Blair.