**South Grampian Deer Management Group**

**Meeting – Kilry Hall Friday 21st Oct 2022**

**Proposed Section 7 Control Agreement Principles**

**Overview**

Both the South Grampian Deer Management Group (the ‘Group’) and NatureScot (‘NS’) recognise that:

- the Scottish Government has an aspiration for an upper limit for acceptable densities of red deer over large areas of open range in the Highlands of 10 deer per sq km or less and that this will drive policy and delivery of government agencies.

- there is currently a climate emergency and biodiversity crisis with a need for action by both the private and public sector.

- the Scottish Government is committed to driving sustainable economic growth and supporting fragile rural communities.

- there is a need for deer management to be economically and socially sustainable in order to ensure the continuance of the resources required to manage the wild deer population.

- It is important that the public and private sectors work together to agree economically, socially and environmentally sustainable solutions.

- Deer management is part of the green economy and new opportunities may arise in the new green economy that may contribute to estate revenues.

- The Group area includes a diverse set of landholdings with differing primary objectives. For some commercial deer stalking is the primary interest and this underpins the economic and social viability of the estate. For other landholdings different land management businesses such as faming and forestry are the main priority and deer control is a necessary cost to their primary business. Both interests have to be recognised and balanced.

**Actions**

**Population**

1. The Group will commit to a reduction cull of the red deer population in the Group area starting from hind season 2022/23.
   1. In Year 1 of the S7 Agreement this will be XYZ hinds and XXK stags.
2. The trajectory of that cull towards the recognised government target of 10 deer per sq km will be informed by an adaptive process that should give confidence to Group members and NS. That adaptive process should be informed by:
   1. Habitat assessments which will ascertain whether damage is occurring on the designated sites and by what
   2. The threshold of economic viability of the estate’s businesses in the Group area that rely on deer stalking to be sustainable and retain rural employment.
   3. The work and outputs of the Heritage Horizons project which the Group is working on in partnership with the Cairngorms National Park Authority.
   4. Occupancy and movement data to much better inform the seasonal occupancy, movement and distribution of deer and hence more accurately focus deer management and cull planning.

**Habitat**

1. The Group will commit to work with NS to undertake regular HIA work on the designated sites and related areas to regularly monitor if damage is occurring.

**Economic Viability**

1. The Group will determine what constitutes an economically viable red deer population through a Group assessment of the number of let stags that are required by each business each year and this will help inform the target red deer population for the S7 Agreement.

**Area**

1. The S7 control area should be expanded to include all landholdings that hold red deer that are understood to form the population of deer accountable for the condition of the SAC and hence have influence upon the designated sites.

**Collaboration**

1. All landholdings within the S7 control area should sign the S7 Agreement and agree to deliver the objectives of the Section 7 Agreement in a collaborative manner.
   1. Landholdings within the S7 area that do not sign the Agreement and collaborate to deliver the required collaborative culls risk causing the entire Section 7 Agreement to fail. The Group will not accept responsibility for failure of the Agreement caused by others in the area who do not participate.
   2. The Group expect that Landholdings that do not sign the Agreement and participate will therefore be subject to enhanced regulatory action by NS, to deliver collaborative deer management in order to prevent the risk of any damage to the designated sites.

**Key Outputs and Indicators**

1. Success of the S7 Agreement will be measured in terms of five key outputs:
   1. culls targets achieved
   2. damage levels to the designated sites reducing
   3. economic viability of estates, rural employment and deer management resources sustained
   4. NS successfully achieves participation and collaboration between NS and each signatory to effectively deliver objectives
   5. Appropriate support from NS.