

## **STATEMENT OF COMMON INTEREST AND COOPERATION BETWEEN THE DEER COMMISSION FOR SCOTLAND AND SCOTTISH NATURAL HERITAGE:**

**MOY GAME FAIR: 7 AUGUST 1998**

### **PRESENTATION BY ROGER CROFTS, SNH**

My lords, ladies and gentlemen, welcome to this special ceremony to mark the formal signing of a Statement of Common Interest and Cooperation between the Deer Commission for Scotland and Scottish Natural Heritage. I am delighted to see so many of our colleagues here today. Magnus Magnusson, the Chairman of SNH, sends his best regards from his well-earned holiday base.

At the outset, I wish to put on record our appreciation of the work of DCS, the Association of Deer Management Groups, and, of course, owners, stalkers and all others involved in deer management.

When I look at the environmental challenges facing us in Scotland, one of the most important is the management of the uplands, including the deer range. It is an area for protecting in perpetuity the wealth of wild life and landscape, for enhancing it where this is feasible, for providing a source of income and employment for those who own and manage the land, and for providing a source of pleasure and enjoyment for those who seek sporting pursuits and quiet recreational activity.

We have made much progress in seeking to combine all of these aspirations into a coherent whole. The sense of partnership, the preparedness to listen to and to learn from the perspectives of others have been major features of recent years. Yes, there have been disagreements and all is not yet resolved. But there is, I hope you would all agree, a greater sense of purpose.

Our role in SNH is to advise, persuade and influence policies and practice within the deer range. We regard red deer as an integral part of the natural environment. We view the red deer population as a resource requiring sustainable management. And we see our overall objective as the improvement of countryside quality, measured in terms of the enhanced biodiversity and productivity of the natural heritage within the deer range. We deliberated carefully with a great deal of support from many experts and practitioners, including Commissioners and staff of the old RDC, before we published our policy paper "Red Deer and the Natural Heritage" four years ago.

It should be of no surprise therefore that our Joint Statement sets out clearly six objectives for the partnership between DCS and SNH: to improve our understanding of the relationship between deer and the natural heritage, to provide advice on habitats and the like, to develop Management Plans, to increase awareness of potential deer damage to the natural heritage, to ensure that native deer species are preserved and to promote best practice in deer management.

But what of the action on the ground? We recognise and applaud the reductions in deer numbers in many parts of Scotland and the improvement in the quality of habitat which will result. In so doing, we acknowledge the efforts of DCS, of Deer Management Groups and of deer owners and managers. I know that DCS staff have recently written to Deer Management Groups setting out cull targets. We welcome the Commission's determination to reduce deer numbers and hope that an increasing number of deer managers will work with the Commission to achieve these targets. The outcome will bring deer numbers into balance with the habitat on which the deer depend for the benefit of both.

We continue to see the Deer Management Groups as a focal point for integrating deer and the natural heritage. SNH is working closely with the DCS, the Deer Management Groups and other bodies, notably the Macaulay Land Use Research

Institute, to develop Management Plans. We are clear that Hill Deer, the grazing decision-support model, will be of great assistance. And we have now produced manuals for upland habitat assessment, and with European LIFE funding we have worked with partners to produce an upland grazing manual. We intend to translate these into practical advice and guidance for those directly involved in managing the land itself.

We want to continue working closely with Deer Management Groups in setting objectives for their areas and then provide advice and guidance on actions necessary to achieve these. We therefore welcome the opportunity to participate in individual groups.

One practical issue which can be divisive is that of access. We owe a great deal of gratitude to the Association of Deer Management Groups, and in particular Alwyn Farquharson and Richard Cooke, who first suggested the idea of setting up an Access Forum and I am happy to put on record this inspirational contribution. So we were especially pleased to have the Association add its signature to the Access Forum's *Concordat on Access to Scotland's Hills and Mountains*. It is gratifying to be able to report that adherence to the responsibility placed on all interests is gathering momentum. Nevertheless, access issues continue to attract publicity. We do recognise the difficulties for deer managers in some areas during the culling season when hard work by stalkers can be thwarted by unforeseen disturbance or when walkers are intimidated with provocative signs. That is why the hill-phone system we instigated, providing daily information for hill walkers about deer stalking activities, is such an important initiative. The best measure of its success is the expansion of the scheme from the original participants in the Grey Corries/Mamores, Glen Dochart/Glen Lochy, North Arran Hills, and South Glen Shiel, to Glen Shee and Drumochter. And the new informative deer signs which are beginning to appear are another indication of progress.

We were also very pleased to see the recent Policy Paper on the Control of Sika Deer, published jointly by the Deer Commission for Scotland, the Forestry Commission and SNH. As most of you know, sika deer cause significant damage to our forest and woodland resources and pose a threat to the genetic integrity of red deer.

And what of the future? Our Statement of Common Interest and Cooperation pledges SNH to work closely with the DCS. We have a substantial agenda of joint endeavour ahead of us. Together we are planning a training event for Commissioners and staff in order to provide more guidance on protection of key species and habitats and the appropriate management of these areas. We will provide more guidance on habitat management and the impacts of deer. We intend to see the fruits of our liaison over research brought into practical use. We wish to promote awareness of sites and areas where there are clear benefits to the natural heritage through ongoing deer management.

The Statement will be reviewed at 3-yearly intervals. We look forward to a joint report in the year 2001 on the achievements made on the ground.

I am in no doubt that the Scottish Parliament will take a keen interest in the management of the Scottish uplands, not least the extent to which our joint endeavours with many other partners are managing to reconcile the conflicts between deer management, access and the revitalisation of our natural heritage.

Finally, on behalf of SNH, I wish to pay tribute to Patrick Gordon-Duff-Pennington who will shortly be retiring as Chairman of the Commission. I have not written a poem but we all await eagerly purchasing our copies of your poems Patrick. Under Patrick's stewardship, the Commission has won many allies and has made a great deal of progress. He has worked tirelessly to secure new deer legislation and to increase and then maintain high levels of deer culls. And, from our perspective, we

now have recognition in law, in policy and in practice, of the fundamental relationship between red deer and their range and hence between DCS and SNH. This is epitomised in the Statement of Common Interest and Cooperation which we are about to sign. . Our thanks go to Patrick and all of his colleagues in the Commission and to my colleagues in SNH for helping us to bring this about.