

Irish Deer Management Forum

Fifth Meeting MINUTES

2pm Wednesday, December 16th 2015
Venue: Knights Building, 7 Ely Place, Dublin 2

Independent Chair: Ms. Judith A. Annett.

Attendance:

Chris Fox	Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers Association (ICMSA)	Farming
Tom Short	Irish Farmers Association (IFA)	Farming
Sean Eustace	Wicklow Forest Owners Group	Forestry
John Fenton	Association of Game Shoot Operators (AGSO)	Hunting
Liam Nolan	Deer Alliance	Training
Jim Walsh	Individual	Research/Technical
Declan Little	Woodlands of Ireland	Conservation
Declan O'Neill	Wicklow Deer Management Partnership	Deer Management Group
Seamus Dunne	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine	Government Department
James O Keeffe	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine	Government Department
Wesley Atkinson	Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht	Government Department
Ferdia Marnell	Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht	Government Department
Gerry Leckey	Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht	Government Department

1. Chair's Business

The Chair outlined the objective of the forum, and highlighted the difficulties of addressing issues using a consensus based approach. The Chair noted that a number of Forum members were concerned at the apparent lack of progress in advancing some of the actions in the Deer Management Plan and suggested that the Chair review the need for a consensus approach to issues. The Chair stated that she had corresponded with members in the interim explaining why this remained her aim and the kinds of actions from members that would promote achieving this position. The Chair reiterated that consensus is the approach by which the Forum operates, and that a clear understanding of what this entails is required by all involved.

The Chair also stated that she was keen to learn more about the issues involved from different stakeholder perspectives. In the time since the previous meeting she had attended a Wicklow Deer Management Partnership field trip and meeting on deer related damage sustained by new forestry, woodland conservation and agricultural properties. The Chair also attended a deer carcass handling training session in Co. Roscommon and also attended the meeting between DAFM and farming stakeholders on 22nd October in Dublin.

2. Apologies

Mr. John O'Neill Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
Mr. Paddy Purser, Pro Silva Ireland/Society of Irish Foresters
Mr. Sean Doris, National Association of regional Game Councils

Mr. Pat Hennessy, Irish Farmers Association
Mr. Barry Coad, Coillte Teoranta
Dr. Tim Burkitt, Convenor, IDMF Deer Data Group*

*The position of Mr. Burkitt on the Forum following his retirement was briefly discussed and the chair stated that she wished to see Mr. Burkitt retained on the forum as a sitting forum member.

3. Minutes of Previous Meeting

Minutes of the previous meeting were presented to the Forum and a discussion ensued.

A number of members stated that they wished to see the minutes being circulated to the Forum membership within two weeks of the meeting, and the Secretary responded that this would be subject to resource issues, but would be looked at with a view to improvement.

The minutes of the previous meeting were adopted subject to a number of minor amendments.

4. Matters Arising

An update was provided regarding the outcome of meetings between representatives of the TB working group and senior officials of DAFM. A meeting was held on October 22nd, attended by Sean Eustace, Tom Shortt, and Declan O'Neill. This meeting was also attended by Seamus Dunne, DAFM, and Wesley Atkinson DAHG.

A discussion took place regarding the previous recommendations of the TB group with regard to the need for action by DAFM in relation to a reduction of deer populations. The meeting was described as constructive, and DAFM acknowledged the problems that exist for farmers in the area, and provided a specific acknowledgement that a reduction in deer populations is warranted. However, it is the Department's view that these issues are best addressed using local structures and capacity.

On November 18th/20th an additional meeting took place with farmers and local TD's following specific tasking by Ministers and an additional meeting was scheduled for December 16th. A recommendation from this meeting was to establish a technical group with a link to the current TB working group. It was recommended that the Deer and TB subgroup meet in mid January to revisit the issues with inputs from DAHG/DAFM.

5. Correspondence

A brief report regarding outcomes of a second TB sampling study in East Wicklow was provided by Mr. James O'Keeffe, DAFM. A formal report is yet to be published by the Department. In this study 13.3% of animals exhibited gross lesions symptomatic of bovine tuberculosis. A full report regarding this study and its outcomes is expected to be ready in the New Year.

Mr. Chris Fox, ICMSA stated that the figures were shocking, but also raised questions regarding the current system for identifying TB levels in deer. There appeared to be a discrepancy between current figures and the previous surveys in the past, and the level of examination involved. There is a need to ensure that the system is fit for purpose.

It was stated that there was a need for the DAFM Food safety representative to be present in relation to food safety.

Mr. Damien Hannigan, WDAI said that previous studies had shown a very low level of TB in deer nationally, relative to levels in both Cattle and badgers.

It was suggested that the Central Veterinary Laboratory would be invited to give a presentation on the issue and the culturing and examination methods used to the TB working group.

It was suggested by Mr. Sean Eustace, that the exercise be repeated in West Wicklow, where similar issues with TB are being experienced.

Additional correspondence from Mr Paul Cullen to the Chair was read to the Forum. He stated that there had been considerable media commentary regarding proposed culls of deer populations, and that there was a need for balanced information for such commentary. He queried why the IDMF had not released a statement on the matter to clarify issues.

In response the Chair stated that at this current time, there is not sufficient consensus within the forum to enable the type of cohesion required to issue such a statement that could be viewed as reflecting the views of forum members. Considerable work remains to achieve such a consensus.

6. Reports from Working Groups

A) Communications and Best Practice working group

Mr. Liam Nolan gave an extensive description of the recent work of this group, and presented two formal recommendations to the group (See attached).

A deer management App, as previously discussed appears to be more complicated than envisaged, and would require considerable buy in from agencies concerned. It is felt by the group that the resources required would be better invested in driving delivery of best practice guides to begin with, as a more deliverable option. Scottish National Heritage and the Deer Initiative have assented to the use of the Best Practice guide text, but not the graphics involved. Prior to the meeting Mr. Nolan had requested Forum members to provide a prioritization of 1-20 guides from a list provided, and only a few members had responded prior to this meeting. He set January 8th as a deadline for responses.

Mr. Nolan introduced two recommendations to the Forum, arising from the work of the group. He stated that there were issues with regards to a mandate from the Forum to make recommendations to the Ministers, and with regard to public communications. The issue of mandatory certification was raised in this discussion and met with a mixed response from the Forum. Most hunting and Departmental members were in favour of this, and mandatory certification is a stated objective of the Deer Alliance HCAP structure. Some of the farming members felt such certification would be a barrier to availability of hunters to landowners and the issue of a transition period to permit such an introduction was strongly resisted in the discussions. A forthcoming EU firearms Directive may require such certification in any event. It was suggested that the farming representatives should review this with regard to refining this position.

With regard to the second recommendation, a proposal to issue regular deer news updates, statements of fact, and other pertinent issues agreed by the Forum. This proposal was formally proposed by Mr. Jim Walsh and Seconded by Mr. Declan Little. The recommendation was duly adopted.

B) Deer Hotspots Group

Mr. Sean Eustace delivered a report on behalf of the Deer Hotspots Group. The group had not met prior to the meeting but a number of issues had been advanced, including terms of reference for the group and a number of other issues remained to be agreed by the group.

Key issues for the group to consider included the definition of a deer hotspot, the determination of different levels of response for different levels of deer issues, and standardised methodologies for the measurement of damage to trees and grassland arising from deer. It is proposed to establish additional pilot groups in Co's Wicklow, Laois and Galway, to look at different local issues and

local level responses. A standardised Deep management template can be compiled to guide development in these areas. It is estimated that 3-4 months would be required in each area to collect and compile the relevant data required.

C) Deer Data Group

Mr. Declan Little reported on behalf of this group, and provided documentation arising from a recent meeting with NPWS (Attached).

Discussions had taken place regarding scoping for an online Deer Hunter Licencing system. At present there is no suitable IT structure in place to underpin or support such a system, although the benefits of having such a system would be many. Hunters could be assigned unique Identity codes and an electronic system could in turn support a carcass tagging system that would aid food traceability and control of illegal hunting. Such a system would also underpin development of phone apps etc. A licence fee would offset the costs of establishment and licence operation. It was strongly recommended that the issue of licencing and supporting legislation should be prioritised by DAHG, and the deer data group is now supporting DAHG in the reviewing licence issues.

Mr. Gerry Leckey, NPWS(DAHG) stated that the current system was due for review and ideally a new system would cater for online apps and appropriate fee structures. He also mentioned the adoption of a credit card sized DHL with photo. Damien Hannigan stated that this could be supported by hunters if funding can be ringfenced.

It was proposed and adopted by the forum that the Forum would formally write to the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht recommending adoption of an online licencing system by NPWS, and that the deer data group would clarify further recommendations to the Minister in this regard.

D) TB Subgroup

Mr. Tom Shortt reported that the group had not met since the last meeting, and that a meeting would convene with a DAHG/DAFM technical group to define actions in relation to the issues in Wicklow. He said that the TB group would meet in January 2016.

7. IDMF Action Report

A small drafting group will be convened to assist the chair in drafting a report and deer conservation and management plan. Work on shaping a draft report will commence in Early 2016.

Mr. Jim Walsh, Mr. Damien Hannigan, Mr. Sean Eustace and Dr. Ferdia Marnell agreed to serve on this drafting group.

8. Members Update

Mr. Damien Hannigan, WDAI outlined recent activities of his organisation including a Deer Stalking road show that is holding events in Counties Roscommon, Tipperary, Waterford and Wicklow, including best practice and carcass handling demonstrations and a separate school roadshow.

Dr. Ferdia Marnell, NPWS outlined recent developments regarding the EU invasive alien species list, which now include Muntjac. This places legal restrictions on the movement, importation and trade in this species with a view to limiting further introductions of this species, and facilitates

eradication of the species where warranted. It was suggested by Mr. Liam Nolan that guidance for the specific control of this species are needed and this should be recommended to DAHG. Dr. Marnell said he would look for suitable links to provide to the forum.

Mr. Sean Eustace outlined recent developments with the Manor Kilbride Deer management group, of which he is chair, and which has recently engaged Mr. J. Fitzsimons as coordinator for the project. The project includes a good cross section of hunters and farmers. It is hoped that an update can be provided of project activity in 3-4 months, and these may provide a useful template for other groups.

8. AOB

No issues

9. Next Meeting

The next meeting will take place on Tuesday, March 8th, 2016 and thereafter on the following dates:

Tuesday June 7th, 2016

Tuesday September 6th, 2016

Wednesday December 7th, 2016