

# Draft Deer Management Policy Vision



Inter-agency Deer Policy Group  
September 2011

## DRAFT DEER MANAGEMENT POLICY VISION

- Background
- Interagency Deer policy Group
- Objective
- Deer Policy Vision Statement
- Strategic Principles
- Policy Delivery
- Appendix – Background issues and challenges

### Background

There is substantial evidence to suggest that deer populations of all species in Ireland have expanded in recent times and are now perceived to be at unsustainable levels in some localities. The potential for unmanaged wild deer populations to impact adversely on economic and conservation values of woodland and other habitats has been well documented internationally, and a firm policy response is required to ensure that adverse impacts arising from wild deer in Ireland can be effectively minimised, and deer populations sustainably managed within tolerable limits.

### Inter-agency Deer Policy Group

This paper has been developed by the Interagency Deer Policy Group (IADPG) comprised of deer management professionals drawn from Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (DAHG), Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (DAFF) and Coillte Teoranta. The group was formally established in July 2009, however the basis for establishment and operation of the group is contained in a Memorandum of Understanding between the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) and Forest Service dated July 2006. The primary objective of the IADPG is the development of a Deer management Policy Vision that can be agreed and delivered jointly by both Departments.

Currently the Group is comprised of:

Mr. Wesley Atkinson, NPWS (Group Chairman)

Mr. Ciaran Nugent, Forest Service, DAFF

Dr. Tim Burkitt, NPWS

Mr. Barry Coad (Coillte Teoranta)

### *Objective*

*To develop and maintain an integrated policy framework for sustainable wild deer management in Ireland that fully reflects the desired economic, environmental and social values across relevant land use sectors in the Irish countryside and complies with existing legislative and policy requirements.*

## Deer Policy Vision

Policy should enable ‘the sustainable management of wild deer populations in Ireland within tolerable population limits, towards ensuring that productive and ecological functions of affected land use sectors can be protected; and that the socio-economic potential of wild deer in Ireland can be maximised. This will be achieved through the development of an effective deer management culture across all relevant land use sectors; and through the subsequent delivery of appropriately resourced deer management measures that conform to best practice overseas and comply with existing legislative and policy requirements’.

To be successful:

- Deer management measures must be integrated with existing policy and practice across the range of land use sectors concerned.
- Any deer management policy must facilitate and support applied research where wild deer are concerned, as a basis for further policy development and review.
- It is essential that existing legislative and policy provisions that relate to deer are reviewed and maintained in an up to date manner.

## Strategic Principles

### **Environmental/conservation**

*Wild deer in Ireland will be managed in accordance with accepted international principles and standards of Sustainable Deer Management.*

- Wild Deer are a valued part of the wider biodiversity of the Irish Countryside, however, the potential of deer populations to impact adversely on a range of biodiversity values must be fully recognised where protection of conservation habitats, and their dependent species are concerned.
- A national census of deer population distribution and densities must be carried out as a matter of urgency, as an essential prerequisite to any deer management measures in the field, and to provide an indication of the required scale, extent and likely costs of such measures. A national deer census programme will provide the baseline against which the expansion of current populations can be observed, and by which policy performance can be evaluated over time.
- Deer management practice must take place across a range of spatial scales, corresponding with deer ranging habits, and must take account of existing and desired land management objectives within these areas.
- The conservation requirements of our native Red Deer populations and the need to protect their genetic integrity must be balanced with the need to protect priority habitats and species in areas where these populations exist. Increased vigilance by relevant authorities in both Jurisdictions will be required to ensure that no further illegal introductions of exotic

deer species take place onto the island of Ireland, and that existing populations of farmed and captive deer are managed in a secure and accountable fashion.

## **Economy**

*Wild deer should be managed in a manner that contributes positively to the national economy.*

- The cornerstone of any deer management policy shall be the minimisation of economic losses as a consequence of wild deer populations. These losses include damage to woodland, damage to agricultural crops, transmission of diseases to livestock and the financial consequences of road traffic accidents involving deer.
- Deer management policy measures shall aim to maximise the financial contribution of deer related products and services to both rural and national economies.
- Deer management policy and implementation measures should maximise cost effectiveness and where appropriate make use of existing systems and resources to minimise implementation costs.

## **Social Principles**

*Wild deer should be managed in a sustainable manner, that is safe, humane, and ethically responsible, and that maximises the benefits of deer management to society.*

- The identity of potential stakeholders/stakeholder groups concerned with deer in Ireland must be established as a prerequisite to policy development in consultation with these stakeholders.
- All relevant land use policies must take account of deer management issues. Best practice models for deer management in Ireland must be developed, in line with suitable examples abroad, and these models must in turn be integrated with existing best practice models across relevant land use sectors.
- There is a requirement for greatly improved education and awareness concerning deer management among land use professionals, and among the general public, which will in turn enable the implementation of deer management measures in the field. Long term development of deer management capacity in Ireland will require an appropriate accredited educational framework. This can be integrated with existing 3<sup>rd</sup> level and Continuous Professional Development programmes.
- Further measures are required to support and encourage the contribution of recreational hunters in achieving desired deer management objectives, and towards integrating recreational hunting activity within a structured deer management environment.
- In developing and implementing deer management measures, the welfare and humane treatment of deer populations shall be paramount. Management measures shall conform to international best practice and standards, and comply with existing national and EU legislation regarding animal welfare, food standards and human safety.

## Policy Development Partnership

It is proposed that deer management policy development and implementation would be best progressed within an external partnership arrangement comprised of representatives of sectoral interests and stakeholders concerned, overseen and facilitated by the relevant Government Departments concerned – Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

## Bibliography

National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS) National Deer database  
National Parks & Wildlife Service, 2009- Section 29 Deer Cull Returns.  
National Parks & Wildlife Service, 2009. Red List no. 3, Terrestrial Mammals.  
Department of Agriculture Food and Forestry, 1996. Growing for the Future.  
Forest Service, 2000. Irish National Forest Standard. DCMNR.  
Forest Service, 2000. Forest and Biodiversity Guidelines. DCMNR  
Forest Service 2002. Forest Protection Guidelines. DCMNR  
COFORD, 2005. Protecting Ireland's Forest - The threat from deer.  
Landsdowne, 1937 in: Glanerought and the Petty Fitzmaurices. Pp.196-197 Oxford University Press  
Putnam RJ, 2003. The Deer Managers Companion, Swan Hill Press. 176pp.  
Connolly L., 1996. Survey of Irish Deer Farms. Teagasc. . 24pp  
Department of Agriculture and Food, 2006. Agri-vision 2015.  
Woodlands of Ireland 2009. Deer in Ireland, a review of their current Status and Management Requirements.

## Literature consulted / Web links

DAFF [www.agriculture.gov.ie](http://www.agriculture.gov.ie)  
DEFRA (UK) [www.defra.gov.uk](http://www.defra.gov.uk)  
COFORD , [www.coford.ie](http://www.coford.ie)  
Deer Commission for Scotland [www.dcs.gov.uk](http://www.dcs.gov.uk)  
Forestry Commission [www.forestry.gov.uk](http://www.forestry.gov.uk)  
Forest Commission / Forest Research [www.forestresearch.gov.uk](http://www.forestresearch.gov.uk)  
The Deer Initiative [www.thedeerinitiative.co.uk](http://www.thedeerinitiative.co.uk)  
Natural England [www.naturalengland.org.uk](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk)  
Scottish Natural Heritage [www.snh.org.uk](http://www.snh.org.uk)  
British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC) [www.basc.org.uk](http://www.basc.org.uk)  
Macaulay Land Use Research Institute (MLURI) [www.macaulay.ac.uk](http://www.macaulay.ac.uk)  
Scottish Native Woodlands [www.scottishnativewoods.org.uk](http://www.scottishnativewoods.org.uk)  
National Trust for Scotland [www.nationaltrust.org.uk](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk)

## Appendix: BACKGROUND ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

### Deer Species and Distribution, Introductions and Genetic Integrity Issues

#### Deer Species and Distribution

There are currently 4 known species of deer existing in the wild in Ireland (Red, Sika, Fallow, Muntjac) in addition to unknown populations of Red x Sika hybrids. Rumours of recent introductions of other species (roe and Chinese Water deer) are as yet unconfirmed.

Geographic distribution of all species of deer in Ireland has yet to be comprehensively established. There have been some attempts to capture existing data on deer distribution both from known records and Section 29 Deer Hunting Licence (DHL) returns from hunters. While this data has given some insight into the distribution of Red, Sika, Fallow and Hybrids, until a systematic countrywide survey has been completed these data will only reflect the partial distribution of all deer species, and data collection will continue to be overly reliant on hunter returns.

**Red deer** (*Cervus elaphus*) – Current distribution 84 x 10k squares<sup>1</sup> but have been recorded from Sec. 29 DHL returns<sup>2</sup> in all counties. It is expected that red deer will continue to expand their distribution and population size under current conditions. However, much of the recent increase in distribution can be attributed to assisted dispersal mostly from captive populations from deer farming enterprises. Current estimated population size for red deer is estimated to be 22,410 deer or 7.4% of the total deer population in the country.

**Challenges:** Protection of the Killarney red deer population from the threat posed by hybridisation with sika deer, in addition to threats posed by introduced red deer of unknown genetic background. Management challenges include negative impacts on priority conservation habitats and species, a perceived threat to agricultural enterprises among local landowners, in addition to risks posed to road users in the localities where these deer exist.

---

#### Explanatory Notes

**1. Deer Distribution** Data on deer distribution are derived from a combination of sources: NPWS National deer database, The Badger and Habitat survey of Ireland 1995, Coillte deer database. Deer distribution has also been recorded from Deer Hunting Licence (DHL) returns. However, this data can only be used for comparative purposes as it relies entirely on the skill levels of individual hunters and their ability to accurately determine differences between deer species.

**2. Estimated population size** Figures are based on an estimated average annual off-take of between 8-10% of the total deer population (all species). The total numbers of deer shot are submitted at the end of each season by deer hunters on their DHL (Deer Hunting Licence) returns. However, it is important to note that while the submission of deer hunting licence returns is mandatory, the information provided on total deer shot is at the discretion of the individual making the return. It is accepted that an unknown number of returns are both under-reported and over-reported. Accuracy of DHL returns is therefore somewhat subjective but is currently the only data source available to NPWS on deer culled within the State. Nevertheless, DHL returns have remained remarkably consistent over the last 15 years.

**Sika deer** (*Cervus nippon nippon*) Current distribution 85 x 10k squares<sup>1</sup> but similar to red deer have been recorded from Sec.29 returns<sup>2</sup> in all counties with the exception of Co. Louth. Sika are the most numerous deer species in the country with estimated population size of 142,460 deer or 47.1% of the total deer population in the country. The natural capacity of Sika deer to expand and adapt to habitat change is greatly exacerbated by land management practices that have combined to create a habitat matrix ideal for colonisation by Sika deer.

**Challenges:** Sika deer present a major challenge to sustainable land management. Given their adaptability as a species, it is expected that Sika deer will continue to expand their range and population size for the foreseeable future. To date, culling regimes aimed at reducing Sika deer population densities generally fall far short of requirements for this species. Management challenges include the negative impacts on conservation habitats and species, forestry and agriculture in addition to their high reproductive capacity and the ability to hybridise with red deer.

**Fallow deer** (*Dama dama*) Current distribution 158 x 10k squares<sup>1</sup>. They have been recorded from Sec.29 returns<sup>2</sup> in all counties with the exception of counties Louth and Wexford. Fallow deer are the most geographically widespread species in the country and the second most numerous with an estimated population size of 124,390 or 41.1% of the total deer population in the country.

**Challenges:** Under current conditions, Fallow deer are likely to continue to increase in distribution and population size, again due to the increased presence of suitable habitats. At medium to high density, fallow populations are likely to have significant negative impacts on conservation habitats and species, forestry and agriculture.

**Muntjac** (*Muntiacus reevesi*) A species recently introduced to Ireland, there have been many reported sightings of Muntjac in different parts of the country. These include counties Clare, Offaly, Roscommon, Donegal, Wicklow and Wexford. Returns from Sect. 29<sup>2</sup> show Muntjac specimens have been shot to date in counties Clare, Kildare and Wicklow. Due to their secretive nature and small size, it is unknown to what extent Muntjac has been released throughout the country. Without sufficient surveillance resources, monitoring the spread, potential and real impacts of this species into the future will be problematical. Only increasing numbers of Sect.29 returns from different locations may give some indication as to how widespread and numerous this species is likely to become.

**Challenges:** Experience from other countries (esp. UK, with similar landscape and weather conditions to Ireland) has shown that this species can rapidly increase its range and population size due mainly to its' high reproductive capacity and assisted dispersal. Its small size (equivalent to Labrador dog) and secretive nature makes direct detection of this species almost impossible. The current population size estimate is thought to be < 100 animals but this figure is likely to increase dramatically over the next five years. As highly selective, yet voracious grazers, future management challenges may include negative impacts on conservation habitats and species, secondary impacts on priority conservation species, in addition to economic impacts on forestry and agriculture.

**Red x Sika hybrid** Current distribution 64 x 10k squares<sup>1</sup>. Data from Section 29 Deer Hunting Licence returns suggest that red x sika hybrids have been found in all counties with the exception of Longford, Louth, Mayo, Meath, Roscommon and Waterford.

### **Recent Introductions from Abroad**

There have been two well known introductions of exotic deer species in the 19th century and other more recent introductions within the last two decades. Sika deer were introduced into Ireland by Lord Powerscourt in 1860 and a second introduction of this species was made by Lord Landsdowne in 1897<sup>3</sup>. Between 1987 and 1995 it is known that almost 7,000 Red Deer Specimens were imported into Ireland for deer farming purposes, and a number of these animals were subsequently released or managed to escape into the wild, and now enjoy a widespread existence as feral populations. It is thought that Muntjac (*Muntiacus reevesi*) was introduced illegally into Ireland by persons unknown sometime between from 2000 up to and including 2006. It is unknown if further introductions of this species have taken place or to what extent they have been deliberately released in various parts of the country. Illegal introductions of Roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus*) and Chinese Water deer (*Hydropotes inermis*) may have taken place in the last number of years, but this has never been confirmed.

Increased vigilance by relevant authorities in both Jurisdictions will be required to ensure that no further illegal introductions of exotic deer species take place onto the island of Ireland, and that existing populations of farmed and captive deer are managed in a secure and accountable fashion.