



## For Discussion

**Title: Cairngorms National Park venison subsidy scheme  
2024/25**

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### Purpose

1. This paper presents an update on the delivery of the Park Authority's venison subsidy scheme.

### Recommendations

2. The Performance Committee is asked to:
  - a) Note the progress of the venison subsidy scheme.

### Strategic policy consideration

3. The venison subsidy scheme is designed to incentivise higher red deer hind culls in areas with high density populations. The aim is to encourage all Deer Management Groups (DMGs) to achieve average deer densities of five to eight deer per km<sup>2</sup> in line with the National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP4). Most DMGs within the Park already achieve this density target but deer densities exceeded this target in March 2024 within the South Grampians DMG and the West Grampians DMG.

### Performance dashboard

Performance Measure for 2024/25	Rating	Commentary
Finance: maximise use of £98,000 allocated to the Park Authority from ScotGov via NatureScot for the purpose of creating a trial Venison Subsidy Scheme	Amber	At the time of writing the best estimate is that we will allocate around £25,000 to estates which have applied to the scheme.
Finance: impact on the Park Authority's budget management	Green	There will be no wider impact on the Park finances. Funds were allocated to the Park Authority from Nature Scot in two tranches of £49,000. The first tranche was drawn down from



Performance Measure for 2024/25	Rating	Commentary
		NatureScot but the second tranche was retained by NatureScot and spent elsewhere. We are therefore likely to underspend by around £25,000.
Target culls	Green	By 15 Feb West Grampians had achieved 92% of their agreed target cull. This will reduce deer density within the DMG. South Grampian have achieved close to 100% of their target cull and are likely to achieve the terms of the current Caenlochan Section 7 Agreement one year early. However, NatureScot will organise a helicopter count in March which will generate new count figures.

4. At the end of the hind season 12 estates within the West Grampians DMG had shot sufficient deer to qualify for the venison subsidy. Only one estate qualified within the South Grampian DMG, and this estate is unlikely to claim subsidy. We are encouraging all qualifying estates to make claims. Total claims are unlikely to exceed £25,000.
5. However, both DMGs have achieved large culls which reach or are close to agreed targets. West Grampians DMG has increased its cull, particularly in the eastern half of the area which contains one of the highest deer densities in Scotland. This hopefully sets the deer population on a downward trajectory. South Grampian DMG contains the area covered by the Caenlochan Section 7 Agreement. Culls have been high in this area for many years as the population has been decreasing in line with the Agreement. This made it difficult for estates to achieve an increased cull over previous years and therefore to qualify for subsidy. Scottish Government were insistent that subsidy should incentivise increased culls and that public money should buy “additionality”.
6. The Cairngorms Venison Subsidy Scheme is one of three trial schemes which were designed to incentivise higher culls. NatureScot have run two other schemes on South Loch Ness to target sika hinds and the Central belt to target roe. Both have achieved limited uptake, and a full review of all schemes will follow.



7. A DMG will also review the schemes from a private sector perspective and feed into the public sector review.
8. Estate decisions on cull levels are subject to many influences and a moderate level of incentive will only create a small degree of influence. However, based on results within the Cairngorms, there is some evidence that an incentive scheme can help increase culls in an area where there is good historic count and cull data. There is no evidence that incentives have increased culls in woodland areas where data is lacking and where many landowners have not historically been reporting culls to NatureScot.
9. There is enough evidence to suggest we offer a venison subsidy scheme in 2025/26 but that we re-consider the qualifying terms and NatureScot have secured funding to continue a scheme within the Cairngorms National Park.

**Colin McClean**

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