The Association of Deer Management Groups (ADMG) is the representative body for those who manage Scotland’s wild deer. ADMG understands the Scottish Government’s objective to ‘help simplify and update the landscape of Scottish public bodies to deliver more effective, coordinated Government that can better achieve its core functions for the benefit of the people of Scotland.’

ADMG has voiced concerns about the prospect of a merger of the Deer Commission for Scotland with Scottish Natural Heritage.

While ADMG agrees with the principal that streamlining of public bodies can in some cases improve efficiencies and diminish costs, we have contended throughout on behalf of the majority of our members that we would support the merger if certain steps were taken.

**DCS/SNH merger**

While it may seem disproportionate for one species sector, Scotland’s deer, to have a dedicated agency, the nuances of deer management have undoubtedly benefited from this approach, from the skill base and understanding that has developed within DCS (and formerly the Red Deer Commission), and from a structure with a Board of Commissioners drawing on all aspects of Scotland’s wild deer industry.

Our main concerns therefore in connection with the merger are threefold:

- SNH’s record of delivery is not good, whereas DCS has in the main been supported by the industry and has a much better record of delivery. In addition, the merger of two very different sized organisations does not bode well for the smaller one, particularly when there is a large reservoir of expertise in that organisation (DCS). We would not want to see that expertise lost. Post merger, should it go ahead, SNH will require a campaign to win ‘hearts and minds’ as well as fulfilling the day to day functions that the Commission had formerly undertaken.

- We do not agree with the timing of the merger. There is, understandably, considerable concern among our membership that both the merger and what is in effect a re-writing of the Deer (Scotland) Act are going forward at the same time. In our view it would have been better from an industry perspective if these actions had been planned to occur in sequence rather than in tandem, so that the process of merger could have settled down.
• Should the merger proceed, and we assume it will, we would urge that DCS staff are retained as a cohesive unit. We do not believe that this dedicated skill base developed by DCS can be replicated easily by other SNH staff. The disbanding of the DCS Board also removes a valuable bridge and knowledge base between Government and industry. This makes it all the more crucial that the relationships and trust developed both at director level and in the field are not unwittingly eroded.

We are aware that steps are being taken within the proposed merged body (still to be called SNH) to ensure that our concerns are addressed, including ensuring that staff (DCS) are retained in a cohesive unit; appointing area advisers with deer experience; setting up a time limited advisory panel on deer matters; and recruiting board members at the next round with relevant deer experience.

**ACSSSI/SNH merger**

As ACSSSI is a body appointed by Ministers to advise its own advisor, SNH, we see no major issues with the transfer of functions from ACSSSI to SNH.

Association of Deer Management Groups
11 August 2009