



Sunart Rainforest Project – Sunart Deer Cull Incentive Scheme Discussion, Confirmed Notes

Location: Online & Sunart Centre, Strontian

Date: 23.09.2025 (Paragraphs 3.c. & 4. include **addendums**, detailing information received post-meeting)

Attending: Rory Sinclair (Resipol) Peter Sinclair (Resipol) Jim Jackson (Resipol) Paolo Berardelli (Ranachan Croft) Euan Palmer (SCC Rainforest Coordinator) Craig Holden (SCC Longrigg)	Attending via Video Link (Teams): Victor Clements (NativeWoods Co-operative Ltd) Jamie Macintyre (SCC Longrigg) Graeme Taylor (NatureScot) James Hilder (SCC Director) Ross Dunsmore (SGRPID) Mary Paton (SGRPID) Bruce Taylor (Brambletree Management Ltd)
---	---

1. Welcome & Introductions

RS welcomed all joining both in-person and online, and gave a background to the purpose of the meeting and discussion.

2. NatureScot background on current pilot schemes

RS invited GT to outline the development and implementation of the three currently active deer cull incentive schemes across Scotland. The schemes are in operation in the regions of the Cairngorms National Park, South Loch Ness and Central Scotland.

GT noted that the schemes operate different mechanisms for establishing the baseline at which ‘*additionality*’ is applied. Throughout the development of the schemes, GT noted that the Scottish Government were clear that principle of additionality must be included in any scheme.

GT went on to discuss the variation in cull returns across each scheme, highlighting various levels of success. GT added some general observations noted across the three schemes. A number of participants involved in the schemes could not meet the minimum cull threshold, for which there was various reasons. GT noted that the targeting of different species resulted in difficulty in reaching minimum cull targets. Schemes should pay for both adult and juvenile carcasses to encourage best shooting practice.



RS asked if higher incentive payments per head would have encouraged increased engagement with the incentive schemes. GT responded that participants didn't reach minimum cull target for two reasons: recreational deer stalkers are generally protective of deer numbers, so were unlikely to engage in additionality while other participants would struggle because of lack of time and resource. GT suspected that increased incentive would result in modest uplift in cull returns.

GT also discussed how incentive schemes were administered. Geolocating culled carcasses is important to the integrity of the scheme. NatureScot developed their own application to process cull returns, which will in time be integrated with wider landowner requirements for cull return reporting. GT encouraged working group to use Epicollect5 for Sunart Deer Cull Incentive Scheme.

Following on from key deer management recommendations discussed at previous Sunart Rainforest Project working group meeting (18.09.2025), VC recommended that the incentive scheme should be taken forward by the group. VC recommended that payment should be restricted to hinds and calves only, and that, if possible, the scheme should be taken forward without establishing '*additionality*'.

Action: VC to draft short document outlining rules for Sunart Deer Cull Incentive Scheme.

3. Basic Principles of Incentive Scheme

a. Who can participate?

i. Areas included

Agreement reached by the group that eligibility requirements should follow Nature Scot guidance. Participation in the Sunart Deer Cull Incentive Scheme will be open to anyone who has the legal right to control deer within the project area. All participants in the scheme must hold their DSC1, as a minimum certificate of competency.

ii. Open Hill vs Woodland

Agreement reached by the group that the Sunart Deer Cull Incentive Scheme will operate across the NRF funded Sunart Rainforest Project area, which includes areas of woodland and open hill.

b. Cull Priorities – population reduction

Agreement reached that population reduction is the key target of this incentive scheme, therefore incentive payments to be restricted to hinds and calves culled within the defined project area. It was noted that delivery of this incentive scheme will fall within established season for shooting hinds (Red Deer - 21st of October to 15th of February; Roe Deer 21st of October to 31st of March).

c. Principle of Additionality – should this apply here or not?

Agreement was reached to establish the Sunart Deer Cull Incentive Scheme without the principle of additionality. This was based on lengthy discussions about the merits of establishing a baseline cull target, the likely incentive to meet targets and the administration of the scheme. This discussion was predicated on the assumption that NatureScot had not set any conditions for the Sunart Deer Cull Incentive Scheme.

Addendum: GT subsequently highlighted that the condition of additionality had already been requested by NatureScot through previous correspondence concerning the details of the RRF application. As such, the Sunart Deer Cull Incentive Scheme must set a minimum cull target. GT and Andrew MacMaster (AM) have suggested that this be based on a 5-year median for private properties. For public lands, payments will only be delivered once agreed cull targets across 2025/2026 have been reached.

4. Quantifying Additionality

Based on the *Cull Incentive Scheme Notes* produced by VC and circulated before the meeting, three options are available for setting a baseline cull target.

1. The first would be to pay a sum of money on all deer culled. Given the very low cull levels, a case could be made for this, but there would not be any additionality, and this may then set a precedent that would cause problems in other areas for Nature Scot, who are therefore likely to veto such an approach.
2. The second would be to pay for all hinds and calves above the 5-year average total figure for each property. This would be easy to administer.
3. The third option would be to set a baseline culling intensity per 100 ha, and pay for animals above this. A comparison might be the current LLTNPA scheme, where hinds and calves above a threshold cull of 3 deer per sq km trigger the payments, back counted to 2.5 per ha. However, such a qualifying threshold is much higher than what is currently being achieved in Sunart, and would require an additional 102 animals just to reach the threshold figure. It seems unlikely that properties would be interested in such a scheme.

VC recommends that all hinds and calves qualify for payment above 5- year average figures, with all roe deer qualifying as well, probably at a lesser rate.

Addendum: Following the meeting, VC produced a further information note titled *Recommended Cull Incentive Scheme Draft Rules* (received on the 24.09.2025), which outlines the basic rules of the Sunart Deer Cull Incentive Scheme as agreed at the meeting on the 23.09.2025. VC has determined that the baseline should be set using

either the 5-year average figure, or the median cull figure for each property. In reality, these two measures come to almost exactly the same place (62 vs 61), with no difference for any property > 1 animal.

Action: SRP Working Group to give feedback on VC information note titled *Recommended Cull Incentive Scheme Draft Rules*, and SCC to take forward agreed proposal to NatureScot for feedback.

5. Payment Rates

A roundtable discussion was had to determine an appropriate rate of payment per head. VC warned against setting expectations of high payments for any potential future schemes. VC & GT suggested that an upper guide on the payment rate should be based on the per head price paid to FLS contract stalkers.

Agreement reached that rate will be set at £120 per head for Red deer (including juvenile carcasses) and £70 per head for Roe deer.

6. Administration

a. The role of SCC

JH noted that SCC can manage the administration of the scheme, including verifying cull returns and processing payments. JH also underlined that SCC have a duty of responsibility to ensure that scheme is delivered fairly, and that all activity which results from scheme is above board. GT recommended that the group closely follow NatureScot incentive scheme guidance.

b. Submitting cull return data

Agreement reached that cull returns will be recorded using Epicollect. SCC to administer and monitor data collected, to ensure verified payments.

Action: SRP to setup Epicollect5 account and establish project.

c. Processing payments

VC suggested that establishing a clear payment schedule would be the most appropriate setup.

Action: SCC to consider frequency for processing payments.