



## ENGLISH WOODLAND GRANT SCHEME

### **The Deer Initiative's response to the Forestry Commission public consultation on future incentives for the sustainable management and creation of woodlands**

The Deer Initiative (DI) is a wide partnership of statutory, non-statutory, voluntary and private interests. Whilst originally set up by the Forestry Commission and still, in the main, funded by the Forestry Commission, it has a core staff whose activities are both to co-ordinate the relevant activities of the partners and to deliver some functions directly. Clearly the level of core activity of the DI staff is proportional to the resources allocated directly to the DI. The full partners in the DI are listed at Annex A.

The aim of the DI is *"to ensure the delivery of a sustainable, well managed wild deer population in England"*. The staff and finances of the DI are managed through the DI Ltd, a charitable company limited by guarantee, dedicated to supporting the DI.

This response is the considered view of the partnership, but each partner may be expected to respond independently, particularly in respect of matters of forestry not pertaining to deer.

The partners in the DI believe that whilst the relationship between deer and sustainable forestry is important, effective deer management can only be achieved by examining also the wider effects on the environment and its biodiversity, agriculture, horticulture, transport, rural and urban living. Thus, though it is appropriate for the Forestry Commission to take a major role in promoting deer management, other Government Departments and non-governmental bodies must also play their part.

We believe that in future if deer are to be managed well, it must be at a landscape, or at least deer range scale. Cooperative management across land holding boundaries is therefore a pre-requisite of effective management. The underlying principles for any funding or grant aid, whether for forestry or other uses such as agriculture, must therefore reflect this fundamental requirement.

The DI therefore welcomes the new package of grants, in particular the recognition of increasing regionalisation, but we remain concerned at the overall level of funding available, both at national level and in the regions. We are also conscious that this package remains targeted at individual landowners and woodlands.

This makes encouraging owners to work at the landscape scale a real challenge and we believe that in addition to grant support to individual owners we believe that it is essential for there to be adequate government support to wider initiatives, schemes

and partnership projects such as that to address deer management through the Deer Initiative.

Much seems to ride on the ability of the Forestry Commission and the forestry sector generally to engage with other sectors and draw in enough regional funds. If insufficient funding is available and levels of grant are too low or restricted then desired action will not be achieved. There is an urgent need to ensure that the Regional Forestry Framework (RFF) process is effective and that other government departments and organisations do engage with the forestry support agenda.

The consultation document at 3.1.3 refers to the 'Sustaining England's Woodlands Review' noting that grants are only one of the elements of support – it is crucial therefore that the other elements of support identified as required or desirable in SEW are also implemented to complement the grants package.

We have confined our answers to the specific questions to those that we believe are directly related to deer and their management in the knowledge that our partner organisations will respond separately on areas of wider interest.

### **Responses to specific questions asked in the consultation document.**

#### **Q3 Do you generally support the proposals for the purpose, operation and payment of WAG? If not please tell us what concerns you and why.**

Yes these proposals are supported. However, there is currently a dearth of suitably qualified individuals who are available to accurately assess deer impacts in the context of a wider ecological assessment. We believe that there needs to be recognition of this and in particular, with reference to 6.3.3, we do have concerns as to who will be deciding on the competencies felt appropriate for individual assessors and how practitioners will be selected for inclusion on regional lists.

#### **Q4 Do you think that the activities proposed for WMG are appropriate and adequate? If not what are your concerns and are there other actions that you would wish to see included?**

We welcome the inclusion of deer control as an activity for the award of WMG and would anticipate that any deer management planning would also incorporate open space and sustainability monitoring.

#### **Q5 Do you generally support the proposals for the purpose, operation and payment of WMG? If not please tell us what concerns you and why.**

We do have concerns about the level of payment and potential costs of some of these, especially in relation to deer control. Will it be possible for example to fund deer management plans through WAG through WIG if WMG levels are insufficient to allow for these to be undertaken otherwise?

In some regions there has been a move to grant-aid deer control on the basis of the number of deer culled rather than the area of woodland involved. This approach is particularly valuable in small ancient woodlands with high biodiversity value and high densities of fallow or muntjac deer where the cost of effective deer management may be extremely high.

We do have concerns though that having raised expectations with this grant proposal there will be insufficient funds to implement it widely enough.

We are generally supportive of the proposals subject to our concerns noted above.

**Q6 Do you generally support the proposals for the purpose, operation and payment of WRG? If not, please tell us what concerns you and why.**

This section does not identify what elements will be considered in 'agreed costs'. We assume these must include, tree protection, fencing, deer control and not just those of direct plant costs and planting labour. In many parts of the country, particularly where there are high densities of fallow and muntjac deer it may not be possible to achieve the desired outcomes without resorting to fencing or significant deer control. We believe that the guidance should acknowledge this.

**Q7 Do you generally support the proposals for the purpose, operation and payment of WIG? If not, please tell us what concerns you and why.**

We note that there is no specific reference to deer or other pest control in the WIG section, although specific mention of management for species is mentioned. The current WIG scheme is extensively utilised to help fund the writing of deer management plans and the capital expenditure on the infrastructure to allow effective deer management. We fervently hope that these activities will still be acceptable under the proposed scheme and would wish to see a specific acknowledgement of this in the new guidance.

Although it would have been even better to see an increase in the initial grant rate the proposed purpose and operation of new WIG is welcomed. We hope that the emerging RFFs will indeed be able to increase the rates that may ultimately be available.

**Q8 Do you consider that the Woodland Creation Grant objectives adequately express the current priorities for grant support for new woodlands? If not, why?**

We would like to see greater emphasis on opportunities for creation of productive woodlands and on growing for quality. Including recognition and incentives in grant rates e.g. for use of broadleaved planting stock from selected stands, or qualified or tested material under the new FRM regulations.

**Q11 Do you generally support the proposed arrangements for WCG grant payment? Please tell us if anything in the proposals concerns you and why.**

In the woodland creation section generally we are concerned that the need for and costs of early years' maintenance and protection particularly deer management of these newly planted areas may not have been adequately addressed.

We believe there is a need to consider supplementary payments to reflect specific needs for successful establishment in different sites, e.g, for capital costs such as fencing, high seats etc, or activities such as culling.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion we would reiterate that we believe that if sustainable deer management is to be achieved, allowing our woodlands to thrive, then we must address the need for landscape scale management and this must include incentives for landowners to cooperate.

Peter Watson  
Director