IRISH DEER MANAGEMENT FORUM
STATEMENT ON WILD DEER IN IRELAND

30th January 2017

Wild deer in Ireland are part of Ireland's natural biodiversity and are a protected species under the terms of the Wildlife Act, 1976 (as amended). The wild deer population in Ireland consists of red, fallow, sika, and hybrid deer. Muntjac deer have also been recorded in the wild in Ireland but have been declared invasive on a European basis.

Adult deer have no natural predators in Ireland (the wolf would historically have been one) so the population is kept under control by landowners, professional deer managers and recreational shooting interests.

Deer management operations are regulated by National Parks and Wildlife Service and take place within specific seasons.

The Irish Deer Management Forum was appointed in 2015 to deal, in a coordinated way, with a range of issues that had become of concern to people and organisations in Ireland. At that time chief concerns included:

- Wild deer grazing on spring pasture destined for sheep and cattle
- Wild deer involved in road traffic collisions
- Poaching of wild deer

One of the most difficult issues to be dealt with was the emergence of deep concerns by farmers in Wicklow on the density of deer in the county and strong suspicions that wild deer were contributing to the continuing high level of Bovine TB reactors in cattle in the area.

Against this background the Irish Farmers Association asked the Department, (prior to the establishment of IDMF) to identify if wild deer may be a vector for the transmission of the disease to farmed cattle.

In order to establish the levels of bTB in the wild deer herd, the Department initially sampled 103 deer carcases within the Wicklow East area, on lands on or adjacent to 33 deer herds that had experienced recent serious bovine TB problems. The area that samples were taken from totalled 5.3% of the total Wicklow East area and lay within 4 District Electoral Divisions close to Roundwood.

Of a sample of 103 deer, 16 animals tested positive for *Mycobacterium bovis*. Of these,

- 5 animals showed evidence of being tuberculous to an extent that they had gross lesions and would have been likely to infect other animals they came into close contact with,

- 2 tested positive for *Mycobacterium bovis*, showed no signs of lesions when examined but may in time have gone on to develop lesions and to present a risk to other animals,
- 9 had localised tissue samples that tested positive, but were considered to be at low risk of affecting other animals.
- All animals taken in the first sample were Sika Deer (*Cervus nippon*)

A second sample of 30 deer (which comprised Sika Deer with a small component of Fallow Deer) was examined in a second part of Wicklow East with 23 carcasses showing no signs of infection, 4 showing gross lesions, 1 showing no lesions but testing positive for *M.bovis* and a further 4 that had local tissue samples testing positive but at low risk of infecting other animals.

IDMF received a presentation from the Forum's farming representatives and acknowledged their levels of concern about the economic future of milk and beef farming operations in the area.

Whilst the data refers to parts of East Wicklow, many farmers believe that levels of bovine TB in deer may be similarly high across the county.

The IDMF considered this data and recommended that in the interest of deer welfare a programme to reduce deer density should be designed and undertaken in the Calary Area in Wicklow within prescribed seasons and measures. This programme is in the process of being designed by a working group convened by the Department of Agriculture and the National Parks and Wildlife Service with input from IDMF and the Wicklow Deer Management Partnership. Local farmers and hunters have been invited to a meeting about the project. A local coordinator has been appointed.

The aim of the programme is to reduce the density of deer (specifically sika deer (*Cervus nippon*) in the area.

Key information:

1. There is presently no conclusive evidence of a link between the strain of Bovine TB in cattle and the strain in the wild deer herd.
2. IDMF has requested strongly to the two Departments that a causal link must be established if any cull measures other than on the grounds of deer welfare are proposed.
3. Levels of Bovine TB in deer within the Calary area cannot be taken as representative of levels anywhere else in Ireland or even of anywhere else in County Wicklow.
4. The population of wild deer in Ireland or of any of its counties is currently unknown as are the trends in population. However, the tables below give an indication of deer management activity county by county.
5. During the rut or mating season the number of deer crossing roads increases.
6. Selection of sampling deer Bovine TB levels in the Calary area and second test area was carried out as Bovine TB problems had been experienced within farm livestock in these areas. The testing methodology used was far more detailed than that used for livestock so levels cannot be compared directly.

7. Management of a wider range of interactions between wild deer and humans are also being considered through IDMF in the country as a whole. These include deer grazing spring pastures that have been set aside for cattle and sheep; damage to farm crops and forest and woodland plantations; damage to some nature reserves; and road traffic collisions involving deer, these will be addressed throughout 2017.

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Appointed jointly in March 2015 by the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine and the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht - now Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs)

For more information see **www.idmf.ie**.

Deer Management in Ireland – A Framework for Action published by DAFM and DAHG in 2015 may be downloaded from the IDMF website.

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