



Media Release

Date: Monday 15th December 2008

MP's join campaigners at 10 Downing Street to call for greater protection for the UK's declining seals

A delegation of MPs will visit No 10 Downing Street on Tuesday December 16th at 4.30pm calling for an immediate and comprehensive ban on the deliberate killing of all seals in UK waters, including Scottish waters. An estimated 5,000 seals are shot in Scottish waters alone each year by salmon farmers and other fisheries interests. The same letter, addressed to the Scottish First Minister Alex Salmond, was handed in at Holyrood on Tuesday 24th November 2008.

The delegation, led by the Seal Protection Action Group, will unfurl a banner reading 'CEASEFIRE FOR SEALS' and will be joined by Liberal Democrat MP Norman Baker, Conservative MP David Amess and Labour MP Robert Flello.

Andy Ottaway of the Seal Protection Action Group will be handing in a letter address to Prime Minister Gordon Brown calling for greater protection for our globally important seal populations signed by 28 leading conservation and animal welfare charities including the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA), Advocate for Animals, PETA Europe, Compassion in World Farming (CIWF), Animal Aid, British Divers Marine Life Rescue (BDMLR), Animal Concern, International Animal Rescue (IAR), Save our Seals Fund, Seawatch Foundation and Care for the Wild amongst many others. The letter is also supported by the Labour Animal Welfare Society and Scottish Green Party.

Recently scientists from the Sea Mammal Research Unit (SMRU) revealed what they described as a 'frightening' decline in the number of common seals around the whole UK coast. Under present outdated legislation – The Conservation of Seals Act (1970) – fishing interests, including salmon farmers, can shoot seals, even during the breeding season, to prevent 'damage' to their equipment or stock.

Last week two fishermen were charged in connection with the brutal clubbing to death of around 20 grey seal pups on a remote island in the Shetlands.

"The horrific clubbing of the seal pups in Shetland is another tragic reminder of the ongoing cruel persecution of the UK's globally important seal populations." said Andy Ottaway of the Seal protection Action Group "Now scientific evidence supports our view that this culture of killing seals must be stopped before it is too late."

The campaigners have also called on major retailers such as Tesco, Sainsbury's and Marks and Spencer to insist that seals are not shot by their Scottish salmon suppliers. Sainsbury's, the market leaders in Scottish salmon, has recently committed to end seal shooting as quickly as possible.

"We are calling on the British and Scottish Governments to introduce emergency measures to fully protect all our seals from any deliberate killing and to replace outdated legislation with a Protection of Seals Act as quickly as possible. We are also calling on the public to avoid Scottish salmon unless they can be assured that no seals have been killed. Dead seals is too high a price to pay for Scottish salmon"

For further details about the campaign please visit www.sealaction.org or www.protectourseals.org

-ENDS-

Interviews

For interviews, further information or photographs, please contact Andy Ottaway of the Seal Protection Action Group on 01273 471403.

Photo Call:

There will be a photo-call opportunity at 4.30pm on Thursday 11th December outside 10 Downing Street where activists dressed as seals and MPs will be handing in a letter for Gordon Brown.

Notes to Editors

- The Seal Protection Action Group (SPAG) registered charity (SC017447) is dedicated to the protection of seals and their environment worldwide www.sealaction.org
- SPAG is a founder-member of the Seal Protection Groups coalition: www.protectourseals.org.uk
- The new research on seal populations was conducted by the Sea Mammals Research Unit (SMRU) at St Andrews University and the latest figures show that last year common seal numbers fell from 4,256 to 3,379 in Orkney, from 1,056 to 800 along the eastern coast of the northern Highlands, from 113 to 102 in the north-east, in Grampian, and from 6,702 to 4,732 on the west coast from Oban to the Mull of Kintyre. There was also a fall, from 445 to 215, in Fife, and by nearly half in the smaller populations around Lothian and Dumfries and Galloway. In English waters, smaller populations at the nature reserves at Blakeney Point, in Norfolk, and Donna Nook, in Lincolnshire, also fell sharply. Some areas have shown increases, particularly the Wash, where numbers rose from 1,695 to 2,162 last year. But total numbers across the UK fell by 12% last year at the 13 sites where counts were made over two years - down by 3,120 animals to 23,277, a drop that early figures suggest has continued this year.

Source: *The Guardian* 20th October 08: www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2008/oct/20/conservation-wildlife-seals-marine-endangered

- Two men have been charged on the Shetland islands for the slaughter of over 20 seal pups. As reported in the Shetland Marine news on 12/12/08 http://www.shetlandmarine.com/2008/07%20Environment/second_man_charged_with_seal_deaths.htm
- The UK, including Scottish waters, are home to globally important populations of grey and common (harbour) seals. About 39% of the world population of grey seals is found in Britain (estimated at 120,000) and over 90% of these breed in Scotland. In addition, it is estimated that 35,000 of a world population of about 500,000 common (harbour) seals are in British waters, with 86% of these in Scotland.

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Scottish Reg. Charity No: SC017447

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