



Media Release

Date: Wednesday 17th December 2008

MP's lobby Prime Minister for a seal ceasefire

Yesterday (Tuesday 16th December) Liberal Democratic MP for Lewes 'Norman Baker' and Labour MP for Stoke-on-Trent South 'Robert Flello' joined campaigners at 10 Downing Street calling for an immediate and comprehensive ban on the deliberate killing of all seals in UK waters, including Scottish waters.

Under current laws, which are almost 40 years old, fishing interests, including salmon farmers, can shoot seals to prevent supposed damage to their stock. Recent studies show that total numbers of seals in the UK declined by 12% last year, and an estimated 5,000 are shot each year in Scottish waters alone.

Talking about his support for the campaign, Liberal Democrat MP for Lewes, Norman Baker said:

"It is disgraceful that so many seals are still subject to this annual slaughter. The current legislation is woefully outdated and it is vitally important that we immediately amend the law so that seals get the protection they deserve. The government must act."

The campaigners, led by the Seal Protection Action Group unfurled a banner reading 'CEASEFIRE FOR SEALS' and handed 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.

"It's a disgrace that seals are still tragically slaughtered in parts of the UK and it needs to end" said Labour MP for Stoke-on-Trent South, Rob Flello *"There can be no excuse for such barbaric practices and I support the calls to ban this practice and restore the rapidly declining numbers of our common seals."*

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.

Andy Ottaway of the Seal Protection Action Group concluded,

"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.

Norman Baker, MP for Lewes

Please contact Phil Bell, Parliamentary Researcher for Norman Baker MP on 0207 219 2864.

Robert Ffello, MP for Stoke-On-Trent South

Please contact Jane Heggie Parliamentary Assistant to Rob Ffello MP on 01782 418 081.

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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