



# Media Release

Date: Thursday 18th December 2008

## Two men appear in court over horrific seal pup slaughter

Two fishermen charged with the deaths of 21 grey seal pups on the small island of East Linga in the Shetland Islands have now appeared in court.

John George Eunson, aged 44, of Seefeld, Symbister, Whalsay, and 47 year old Jimmy Stewart, of Ellies Knowe, Saltness, Symbister, Whalsay, have been charged with mutilating, beating and crushing and wilfully killing 21 grey seals with intent to cause unnecessary suffering under the Wild Mammals (Protection) Act.

Both men have also been charged under the Conservation of Seals Act for killing seals during the closed breeding season, between 1<sup>st</sup> September and 31<sup>st</sup> December, when grey seals are nursing their newborn pups.

UK waters are home to globally important populations of both grey and common seals and campaigners are calling for the replacement of The Conservation of Seals Act (1970) with legislation that strictly protects seals. The CSA is viewed as outdated providing little more than a licence to kill seals, except during their respective breeding seasons. Under the Act, fishing interests, notably salmon farmers, anglers and netsmen can shoot seals perfectly legally to prevent damage to their equipment or stock.

To date there has only ever been one successful prosecution under the Conservation of Seals Act 1970, and that related to the use of a shotgun, rather than a rifle, to kill three seals. Over the years there have been numerous illegal seal killing incidents around the Scottish coast, some of which the police have investigated, though no charges were ever brought.

A coalition of animal welfare groups, led by the Seal Protection Action Group, are calling for new laws to strictly protect seals. An estimated 5,000 seals are killed each year in Scottish waters by salmon farm and fisheries interests and recently scientists have reported that there has been a 'frightening' decline in common (harbour) seals in Scotland and England, although it is not yet clear if grey seals are also at risk.

The two men arrested over this recent horrific grey seal pup slaughter made no plea when they appeared in the dock and they have also been excused from appearing in court when the case is recalled on 15 January after Mr Stewart one of the defendants said he would be at sea fishing on that date.

SPAG'S Campaign Director Andy Ottaway said:

***"This appalling case highlights the need for greater protection for our globally important seal populations. This culture of killing seals must be stopped, and our seals receive the full protection under the law from deliberate killing they deserve, before it is too late."***

The coalition of animal welfare and conservation organisations, led by the Seal Protection Action Group are lobbying the British and Scottish Governments to introduce emergency measures to fully protect all of the UK's globally important seals from any deliberate killing and to replace outdated legislation with a Protection of Seals Act as quickly as possible.

Andy Ottaway of the Seal Protection Action Group along with other members of the coalition visited 10 Downing Street on Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> December to hand in a letter to Prime Minister Gordon Brown calling for an immediate and comprehensive ban on the deliberate killing of all seals in UK waters, including Scottish waters. The campaigners were joined by Liberal Democrat MP for Lewes Norman Baker and Labour MP for Stoke-On-Trent South Robert Ffello.

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Talking about his support for the campaign Robert Fleelo MP for Stoke-on-Trent South has said:

***“It’s a disgrace that seals are still tragically slaughtered in parts of the UK and it needs to end. 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.”***

Liberal Democratic MP, Norman Lewes added:

***“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 same letter, addressed to the Scottish First Minister Alex Salmond, was handed in at Holyrood on Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> November 2008.

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](http://www.sealaction.org) or [www.protectourseals.org](http://www.protectourseals.org)

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

## **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](http://www.sealaction.org)
- SPAG is a founder-member of the Seal Protection Groups coalition: [www.protectourseals.org.uk](http://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 across the UK 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* 20<sup>th</sup> October 08: [www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2008/oct/20/conservation-wildlife-seals-marine-endangered](http://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 21 seal pups. As reported in the Shetland News on 18<sup>th</sup> December [http://www.shetland-news.co.uk/news\\_12\\_2008/Men%20charged%20with%20seal%20deaths.htm](http://www.shetland-news.co.uk/news_12_2008/Men%20charged%20with%20seal%20deaths.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**

**The Seal Protection Action Group is dedicated to protecting seals and their environment worldwide.**