



# Media Release

Date: 21st October 2008

## Campaigners call on supermarkets to save disappearing seals

As scientific research revealing a “frightening” fall in the numbers of common seals around the UK coast, wildlife campaigners are calling on high street retailers to help protect them by insisting their Scottish salmon suppliers stop shooting seals.

Scientists from the Sea Mammal research Unit (SMRU) have described the decline in seals as ‘frightening’ but are uncertain as to its cause. However, the Seal Protection Action Group (SPAG) believes that the indiscriminate shooting of an estimated 5,000 seals each year in Scottish waters has played its part and must be stopped.

The UK’s globally important populations of common and grey seals can be shot perfectly legally under the Conservation of Seals Act (1970). This outdated legislation makes it perfectly legal to shoot seals to prevent ‘damage’ to fish farm equipment or stock.

Campaigners believe that salmon farmers can deter seals and other predators by using non-lethal methods such as properly maintained, tensioned nets and other devices, without resorting to lethal methods. Unfortunately, the bullet is all too often seen as the easiest and cheapest option.

The Seal Protection Action Group has written to all High Street retailers calling on them to insist that their suppliers of Scottish salmon stop seal shooting, and to stipulate this in their supply contracts. For example, Sainsbury’s have recently signed a multi-million pound supply contract with Marine Harvest, a Norwegian company that operates many salmon farms in Scotland. Marine Harvest has been implicated in several incidents involving the shooting of seals, most recently reported in the Independent on Sunday on May 25<sup>th</sup> 2008.

“This culture of killing must stop and we are calling on the retailers to use their considerable purchasing power to persuade Scottish salmon producers to stop shooting seals’ said Andy Ottaway of SPAG, ‘We are also calling on the public to avoid Scottish salmon unless they can be assured that no seals have been killed. Our seals are disappearing and we must act now before it is too late.’

For further details about our campaign please visit [www.sealaction.org](http://www.sealaction.org)

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## **Interviews**

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 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. This was recently reported in Guardian Newspaper [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)

Scotland is 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.

Marine Harvest admitted shooting 2 seals found on a Skye beach in May 2008 as reported in the Independent on Sunday newspaper: <http://www.independent.co.uk/environment/nature/tough-new-rules-brought-in-to-curb-scottish-seal-killings-834035.html>

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**Scottish Reg. Charity No: SC017447**

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