



Media Release

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MPs support campaign to end UK's 'shameful' seal slaughter

A campaign to end the slaughter of seals around the British coast has received a boost with 124 MPs signing a Parliamentary motion calling for greater protection for our globally important seal populations.

The campaigners believe that up to 5,000 seals are slaughtered by the Scottish salmon industry alone every year.

The Seal protection Action Group (SPAG) is calling on the UK and Scottish Governments to provide full protection for our seals. The campaign to stop seal shooting in the UK will feature on BBC One's flagship rural affairs programme 'Countryfile' this Sunday 5th April. The show, to be screened at its new prime time slot of 7pm, will be presented by veteran broadcaster John Craven.

"The British public are appalled at the mass slaughter of seals in the Canadian seal hunt which resumed last week", said Andy Ottaway, Campaign Director at SPAG, "They will be horrified to learn that the mass killing of seals is taking place in this country all year round".

The UK is home to globally important seal populations of grey and common seals. Just recently scientists from the Seal Mammal Research Unit (SMRU) discovered a 'frightening decline' in the national population of common seals, most markedly in Scottish waters, where seal shooting is commonplace.

Surprisingly, these popular marine mammals are not fully protected under UK law. Under the Conservation of Seals Act (1970) it is still perfectly legal to shoot seals to 'protect' fishing equipment or stock. However, SPAG believes this outdated law is simply used to justify the persecution of animals that fishermen view merely as pests.

"Surely the Scottish salmon industry, which is worth hundreds of millions of pounds can find ways of keeping seals away from their stock without killing them" said Campaign Director Andy Ottaway, "The simple truth is that all too often the bullet is seen as a cheap and permanent solution."

SPAG believes there is a 'culture of killing' seals that is encouraged by an outdated law that allows seals to be killed to prevent damage to fisheries, stock or equipment. For example, last November 21 seal pups were bludgeoned to death in the Shetlands by a fishermen, and last year several shooting incidents involving seals were reported in national newspapers.

"We believe dead seals is too high a price to pay for Scottish salmon," said Ottaway, "There is scientific, political and public support for the law to be changed to fully protect our seals and for retailers to insist that their salmon suppliers stop killing our seals".

-ENDS-

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Photos: Images of shot seals are available on request and can be viewed at: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/sealprotectionactiongroup/sets/72157616174121119/>

Contact: For further information please contact: Andy Ottaway on 01273 471403 or 07855 666069

Notes to Editors:

- The Seal Protection Action Group (SPAG) is a registered charity dedicated to protecting seals and their environment worldwide www.sealaction.org.
- Scientists from the Sea Mammals Research Unit (SMRU) have reported a “frightening” decline in common seals in the UK. http://www.smru.st-andrews.ac.uk/documents/SCOS_2008_v1.pdf
- Seal killer jailed http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/north_east/7961442.stm
- Call to stop seal killings <http://www.independent.co.uk/environment/nature/tough-new-rules-brought-in-to-curb-scottish-seal-killings-834035.html>
- Early Day Motion 678 ‘Protection of Seals’ has been signed by 124 MPs <http://edmi.parliament.uk/EDMi/EDMDetails.aspx?EDMID=37729&SESSION=899>

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