



Media Release

6th April 2009

Seal Campaigners dispute Scottish seal death figures as 'simply unbelievable'

The Seal Protection Action Group (SPAG) today dismissed claims that only 489 seals were shot last year by Scottish salmon farms as 'simply unbelievable'.

Scott Landsburgh of the Scottish Salmon producers' Organisation said on BBC 1 News, and on BBC Countryfile, yesterday evening April 5th that there were 30,000 seal attacks on salmon farms last year. He also stated that the industry shot 489 seals.

In a recent letter to Andy Ottaway of the Seal Protection Action Group (SPAG), Ian Walker of the Marine Directorate of the Scottish Government said 'there are 490 fin fish aquaculture sites in Scotland, but that only around 270 of these are marine sites, which are likely to be subject to seal predation'.

SPAG Director Andy Ottaway said that if the Scottish Government figure of 270 active marine farms were reporting just 489 seals shot that would average at less than two seals shot per farm per year. Furthermore, 30,000 attacks on farms would mean an average of 111 attacks on each farm per year, two attacks per week, but only 1.8 seals shot all year. That means the industry claims only 1.5% of attacks lead to a seal being shot and that, they argue is simply unbelievable.

A leading retailer has admitted to SPAG that their suppliers shot 150 seals last year. Even a conservative estimate would mean around 1,500 seals could have been shot in total on all sites. This figure does not include the number of seals shot at salmon netting stations, by District salmon angling fishery Boards, creel and other fishermen, believed to kill thousands more animals.

"The industry's claim that only 489 seals are shot each year simply doesn't add up", said Campaign Director Andy Ottaway, "Even if it were a true figure, that's 489 seals too many that are dying to maximise the profits of an industry worth hundreds of millions of pounds".

The campaigners also dispute that seals are protected during the closed or breeding seasons. Under the existing outdated Conservation of Seals Act Section 9 (1)(c) seals can be shot during the breeding season 'where a seal is killed to prevent damage to fishing nets or tackle or to fish captured in these nets or tackle provided that at the time the seal was in the vicinity of these nets or tackle'.

Campaigners believe that farmers use the law to justify shooting seals during the breeding season when dependent pups would be left to starve after their mother is shot. They also argue that if the law is respected by fish farmers then seals could not be shot between June 1st- August 31st for common seals and Sept 1st – 31st December for grey seals.

The campaigners argue that if, as we are expected to believe, fish farmers don't shoot seals attacking their nets for several months during the breeding season, then why do they have to shoot them for the rest of the year?

The campaigners have written to all leading retailers of Scottish salmon, including High Street Supermarkets, calling on them to insist that seals are not killed by their suppliers and for an immediate "ceasefire for seals".

"We are calling for an immediate ceasefire for seals and are calling on all retailers of Scottish salmon to insist their suppliers stop killing them", said Andy Ottaway, "We know the public support our view that dead seals is too high a price to pay for Scottish salmon".

-ENDS-

P.T.O

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 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.
- Claims of secret seal slaughter <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/7981598.stm>
- Scientists report 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’ signed by 125 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.