



Media Release

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Scottish Salmon Producers want secrecy over seal killings

Campaigners seeking to end the slaughter of thousands of seals in Scottish waters by the salmon industry today condemned attempts by the Scottish Salmon Producers Organisation (SSPO) to undermine attempts to protect seal populations under proposals in the Scottish Marine Bill.

In a document submitted to the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee the SSPO also calls for provisions to be included to 'protect the health and welfare of farmed fish', as required under the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006, which they claim is 'a statutory farmers'.

"The industry is trying to justify the mass slaughter of seals in order to protect the welfare of caged fish", said Andy Ottaway of the Seal Protection Action Group, "We can't help feeling it is a tad hypocritical to argue that seals must die so that caged fish are protected. These fish live their lives in cages to be slaughtered for profit. I don't think this argument will wash with the salmon buying public. They already think killing seals is too high a price to pay for Scottish salmon."

The SSPO document also takes issue with the proposed requirement to report the killing of individual seals to Scottish Ministers, which they dismiss as 'disproportionate and unnecessarily bureaucratic'. They argue that an annual reporting scheme would suffice, but the campaigners claim that the new measures, if applied correctly, would protect individual seal colonies from being wiped out, as well as hugely reduce the number of seals killed overall.

Common seals are suffering what has been described by Seal Mammal Research Unit (SMRU) scientists as a 'frightening decline' nationwide. Although shooting is not directly blamed the campaigners believe that it cannot be ruled out as a contributory factor and should be banned if only to let populations recover. The campaigners also accuse the industry of a 'culture of killing seals' that must be changed by law.

Perhaps most disturbingly the SSPO try to justify continued secrecy over seal killings by accusing the campaigners of unspecified extremism. They state, "there is a deep concern on both the part of individuals and of businesses about the way seal licence data will be publicly reported. There is a body of seal activists in the UK who have shown a willingness to engage in direct and, in some cases, extreme measures".

This totally unsubstantiated statement is used to justify their further argument that 'fish farm personnel have a corresponding right to be protected from threats or actions in undertaking their lawful business. We therefore respectfully request that the Bill should make specific provision for the publication only of aggregate annual data relating to Seal Licences.'

"If the SSPO believe that our campaign to peacefully expose the appalling scale of Scottish seal slaughter is extreme then we are proud to be guilty as charged", said Andy Ottaway, "When will they understand that public opinion is firmly on the seals side and this slaughter has simply got to stop."

-ENDS-

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 or interviews please contact: Andy Ottaway on 0790 0804761 or 01273 471403.

Notes to Editors:

- The Seal Protection Action Group (SPAG) is a registered Scottish charity dedicated to protecting seals and their environment worldwide <http://www.sealaction.org/>
- SPAG research suggests up to 5,000 seals are killed by the Scottish salmon industry each year.
- Rural Affairs and Environment Committee Marine (Scotland) Bill - supplementary submission from Scottish Salmon Producers Organisation 4.0 PART 5: SEALS Drafting Issues and Omissions: <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/s3/committees/rae/bills/Marine%20bill/SSP011june09.pdf>
- Scientists from the Sea Mammals Research Unit (SMRU) report a "frightening" decline in common seals in the UK. http://www.smru.st-andrews.ac.uk/documents/SCOS_2008_v1.pdf
- The Seal protection Action Group's (SPAG) campaign to stop seal shooting was featured on BBC 1's rural affairs programme 'Countryfile' on the 5th April presented by veteran broadcaster John Craven.
- The Scottish salmon industry is worth approximately £400 million per annum. SPAG believes seals can and must be deterred by strictly non-lethal measures, such as correctly weighted anti-predator nets, and for fish-farms to be sited away from seal colonies.
- SPAG believes there is a 'culture of killing' seals encouraged by outdated laws that allow seals to be killed to prevent 'serious' damage to fisheries, stock or equipment In November 2009, 21 seal pups were bludgeoned to death in the Shetlands by a fisherman, and last year several shooting incidents involving seals were reported in national newspapers. 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 128 MPs <http://edmi.parliament.uk/EDMi/EDMDetails.aspx?EDMID=37729>

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Scottish Reg. Charity No: SC017447

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