



Sainsbury's



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New group aims to stop seal killing at fish farms

Salmon farmers, retailers and animal welfare groups are joining forces to bring to an end the killing of problem seals at salmon farms as quickly as possible.

In what is believed to be a world first, Marine Harvest, the world's largest salmon farmer will work with the Seal Protection Action Group as part of the newly formed "Salmon, Aquaculture and Seals Working Group", alongside Sainsbury's, Freedom Food, the RSPCA, the Sea Mammal Research Unit and International Animal Rescue.

Seals have posed a number of problems for the salmon farming industry since its inception in the 1960s, including damaging salmon farm nets and contributing to the release of thousands of salmon into the wild which may threaten wild salmon populations, as well as impacting the welfare of the fish when a site is attacked.

Although it remains legal for salmon farmers to shoot problem seals, the new forum aims to find entirely non-lethal ways of deterring seals while protecting fish farm stocks.

As Alan Sutherland of Marine Harvest Scotland explained: "We appreciate that this has always been a difficult issue for us. Animal welfare and conservation groups are keen to see an end to the shooting of problem seals and we are keen to find alternative ways to stop problem seals taking fish, damaging nets and releasing farmed salmon into the wild. We believe the best solution is to focus on our common aim, rather than arguing about our differences."

Ally Dingwall, Aquaculture and Fisheries Manager at Sainsbury's said: "We welcome the formation of the group and the opportunity to support it through our Responsibly Sourced Salmon initiative. Ground breaking projects such as this are what our Responsibly Sourced Salmon is all about".

Andy Ottaway of the Seal Protection Action Group said "We are determined to end the killing of seals and we are delighted that the world's biggest producer of farmed fish and the UK's leading retailer of Scottish salmon; the RSPCA and the Sea Mammal Research Unit have all committed to work together with us to achieve our goal. We hope the solutions we find will not

just save seals in Scottish waters every year, but countless more worldwide, wherever they are in conflict with aquaculture and other fisheries.”

The Scottish salmon industry has reported that 489 seals were shot on Scottish salmon farms in 2008 whereas some welfare groups believe the number of seals shot in Scottish waters by all fisheries interests including wild netsmen and angling interests to be in the thousands. The group will bring together leading experts on this issue, who will work with the industry to identify best practice methods and equipment to deter seals without harming them or other wildlife. It will look at the current range of seal deterrents such as noise and strengthened and tensioned net systems as well as novel deterrents and examine other methods used in salmon farming countries across the world. Other areas of work will include benign research to identify things that seals will avoid such as particular noises, smells or movement.

Ends

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