



Media Release:

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Scottish government sanctions cull of 1,000 seals each year

The Scottish Government has published details on its website of the number of seals that can be killed this year under the new seal licensing scheme introduced under the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010. Under the new scheme, 65 licences have been issued to kill up to 1,298 seals in total this year.

The Seal Protection Action Group (SPAG) and seal scientist Sue Wilson of Tara Seal Research met with Marine Scotland officials in Edinburgh last December. We expressed our concerns over the new scheme. In particular, the expansion of shooting in to the breeding seasons that could lead to the starving of dependent pups and the lack of any independent inspection or monitoring scheme to ensure that the new quotas are strictly adhered to. We also expressed dismay that quotas may be set for common seals that are suffering an alarming decline and the failure to impose any mandatory non-lethal deterrent measures upon the aquaculture and sports angling industries in order to reduce further and ultimately end seal killings. Without these, any seal killings under the new scheme cannot be considered to be the 'last resort' option intended.

Today SPAG Director Andy Ottaway said, "The Scottish Government's seal licence scheme is a significant step forward in reducing the numbers of seals shot every year in Scotland. However, without an inspection and monitoring scheme, and without the mandatory introduction of non-lethal measures to deter seals, the numbers of seals killed in Scotland will remain unacceptably high. An average of over three seals shot every single day is too high a price to pay for Scottish Salmon."

Meanwhile, SPAG is working with a major producer and a leading retailer of Scottish farmed salmon, along with the RSPCA and scientists from the Sea Mammal Research Unit to end seal killings. The *Salmon Aquaculture and Seals Working Group* was formed in September last year to implement non-lethal solutions to seal predation on salmon farms and other sites such as by using correctly tensioned nets and developing acoustic deterrent devices that do not harm seals or other wildlife.

"We are grateful to Marine Harvest and Sainsbury's for agreeing to work with us to eliminate all seal killings as quickly as possible and we hope the Scottish Government will do the same" said Ottaway, "We know it is perfectly possible to deter seals and other wild predators without harming them. The new scheme must not be used to rubber-stamp seal killings, but ultimately to end them altogether."

He added, "The Scottish Government and Salmon industry can and must implement better industry practices and technologies to end these seal killings which leave an indelible stain on the international image of both Scotland and Scottish salmon products."

-ENDS-

For interviews, further information or photographs, please contact Andy Ottaway of the Seal Protection Action Group on 01273 471403 or mobile 07900 804761.

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
- Info on the new seal licences granted by the Scottish Government can be found on the Marine Scotland website at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/marine/Licensing/SealLicensing/FAQs>
- A maximum of 984 gray and 314 common seals may be shot under the new seal licence scheme: 1,298 in total
- SPAG estimates that up to 3,500 or more seals are shot in Scottish waters each year
- The *Salmon Aquaculture and Seals Working Group* was established in September 2010 to find and implement strictly non-lethal solutions to seal and aquaculture interactions. The members are: Seal Protection Action Group; Marine Harvest; Sainsbury's; International Animal Rescue; the RSPCA, Freedom Foods and the Sea Mammal Research Unit
- 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
- A public opinion poll dated January 2008 found that 75% of the Scottish public support making the killing of seals illegal in Scottish waters. (The poll was conducted in Jan 2008 by TNS System Three.)
- SPAG is calling on the UK and Scottish Governments to provide seals with the full protection they deserve. SPAG is also calling on all major UK high street retailers to insist their Scottish salmon suppliers stop killing seals. www.sealaction.org/campaigns/scotland

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