

Paddy Tipping

That this House recognises the UK's international obligations to maintain its globally important seal populations at a favourable conservation status; notes that seal populations remain depleted and are threatened by further outbreaks of the phocine distemper virus and remain under increasing threat from climate change, depletion of prey species pollution and deliberate killing; notes with extreme concern scientific reports of a frightening decline in the population of common seals in UK waters; further notes that an estimated 5,000 seals are shot in Scottish waters by the salmon industry; believes that the Conservation of Seals Act 1970 is outdated and in urgent need of review or replacement; and calls on the Government to implement an immediate and comprehensive ban on the deliberate killing of all seals, to replace the Conservation of Seals Act 1970 with legislation for the comprehensive protection of seals in the forthcoming Marine Bill and to liaise with the Scottish Executive to this end.

Information about Seals in Britain & the Conservation of Seal Act (1970) (CSA) **Please help to stop shooting of seals in Britain and change the CSA**

We have a moral duty and international responsibility to protect the UK Common and Grey seal populations on behalf of the rest of the World. Grey and Common seals are 2 of the 9 UK marine species described as 'species of conservation importance'. They are spectacular, iconic marine creatures!



Seal populations

In the latest Scientific Advice on Matters Related to the Management of Seal Populations: 2008 for the Special Committee on Seals (SCOS) it states:

Common (Harbour) Seals

Genetic "analysis suggests that there are genetically distinct Common Seal populations in European waters." (Page 12)

"Britain is home to approximately 33% of the population of the European sub species." (Page 3)

"The most urgent issues are those surrounding the rapid, widespread decline of Common Seal populations around the UK." (Page 21)

"The combined results of the 2006 and 2007 surveys indicate that there have been significant population declines in

- Orkney (approx 40% to 50%)
- Shetland (approx 40%)
- Strathclyde (approx 25%)
- Firth of Tay (>50%)

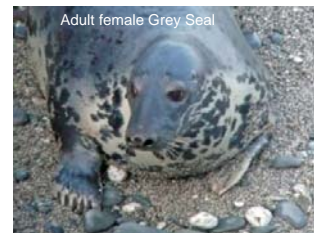
Since 2000." (Page 19)

"Decline observed in the Inner Moray Firth (approx 20% to 30%.)"

"Only the West Coast of Highland region and Outer Hebrides appear to be stable at levels equivalent to those seen in the 1990's." (Page 19)

The English east coast population remains at approximately 60% to 70% of its pre-2002 epidemic level." (Page 19)

"These apparently widespread declines give clear cause for concern." (Page 11)



Grey Seals :

"About 45% of the World population of Grey Seals in found in Britain." (Page 2)

"Within Britain there is again a clear distinction between those seals that breed in the southwest (Devon, Cornwall and Wales) and those breeding in Scotland" (Page 12)

"There are clear indications of a slowing down in population growth in UK and Canadian populations in recent years." (Page 2) "There is clear evidence that the growth is levelling off." (Page 2)

"Total pup production at annually monitored colonies decreased by 2.4%, in contrast to the 3.3% increase in the preceding years." (Page 4)

The graph at the end of this document has been collated from data from the SCOS reports 2000 to 2008.

"The recent levelling off in pup production could be a result of reductions in the reproductive rate or survival of pups or adults." (Page 5)

In conclusion, the scientific advice quoted above suggests a decline in the Common Seal populations from the Shetlands all the way south to the Moray Firth and a stabilisation in the Grey Seal populations.

Science cannot tell us the reasons for the rapid and widespread decline in Common Seals and stabilisation in Grey Seals, but common sense tells us that the causes are likely to be varied and complex. Possible causes may include:-

Declining prey species

Seals predominantly eat Sand eels and there have been documented declines in Sea Bird populations linked to Sand eel populations. With declining prey stocks, Seals are likely to be one of many marine species under pressure as a result of competition for food.

Shooting of seals around Fin Fish Farms and by the Salmon Fishing Industry

The Scottish Executive Agency, the Fisheries Services documented in 2002, that 49% of the 195 Marine Salmon Fish Farm Site managers questioned, said they used shooting as a method of anti predator control. The Moray Firth Management Plan permits a quota of seals to be shot annually, in addition to those shot under the 'netman's defence'. Non lethal anti predator nets & acoustic deterrents are viable alternatives.

Marine Developments, including Marine Renewables

Major marine construction projects close to sites frequented by seals force changes in their lifecycle and behaviour that affect their ability to survive (e.g. Scrobie Sands Wind Farm.)

Disturbance at haul out sites

Seals haul out all year round to rest and digest their food, peaking during the moulting and breeding seasons. The fact that seals have to come onto land increases the range of threats they face at haul out sites. We have observed seals being disturbed at one haul out site up to 7 times in 1 hour (10/07/05.)

Net entanglement

In Cornwall we have photographs of over 60 live* seals that have become entangled in net, much of which is storm damaged or discarded net floating on the sea surface. Figures for the number of seals that drown from net entanglement are unknown. (*To survive, the seal must have returned to the surface within its 12 minutes average air allowance.)

Other factors likely to affect seal populations could include:-

- Changes in predator movements, including Orcas
- Increasing marine pollution affecting seals' immune systems and ability to fight infection and disease
- Increasing marine litter (we have footage of seals 'eating' plastic and crisp packets and have observed a white coat pup swim into a see-through plastic bag.)
- Dredging and any other activity that changes the morphology of sandy sea beds (Sand eel habitat)

The Conservation of Seals Act (1970) is outdated and ineffective legislation, under which only one prosecution has been successful achieved. The two men who have recently been arrested in connection with the death of 21 seals in Shetland (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2009/feb/25/wildlife-scotland>) have not been charged under the CSA, but under The Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996. As part of the Marine Bill, new primary, flexible legislation that more effectively protects seals needs to be drafted, in order that it can be updated through amendment rather than needing whole scale change.

Sue Sayer : Cornwall Seal Group (www.cornwallsealgroup.co.uk)

