

E-MAIL FROM: John F. Robins, Secretary, Save Our Seals Fund (SOSF), C/O Animal Concern,  
Post Office Box 5178, Dumbarton, G82 5YJ. Tel: 01389-841-639, Mobile: 07721-605521.  
SOSF is a recognised Scottish charity: RCNo. SC025489.  
E-MAIL: [sosf@jfrobin.force9.co.uk](mailto:sosf@jfrobin.force9.co.uk) website: <http://www.saveoursealsfund.org/>

Dr Aileen McLeod MSP,  
Minister for Environment, Climate Change & Land Reform,  
The Scottish Government,  
St. Andrew's House,  
Regent Road,  
Edinburgh, EH1 3DG

Dear Minister,

I write concerning the shooting of seals by fishery, aqua cultural and angling interests in Scotland. This is an issue I have been involved in for over thirty years. During that time I have unsuccessfully lobbied the Scottish Office and then the Scottish Government in a bid to obtain true protection for seals in Scottish waters.

Despite my knowledge of the issue (among other things I was the only person to instigate a successful prosecution of a seal shooter under the Conservation of Seals Act 1970) I was repeatedly refused access to the group which advised the Scottish Government on the creation and implementation of the licensing scheme which now governs seal shooting in Scotland. That group was three to one weighted in favour of pro seal shooting organisations and as a result the legislation which was produced is also heavily weighted towards those with a vested interest in killing seals.

Under the licensing scheme salmon farmers are issued with licenses to shoot seals under the auspices of protecting their stock from the attention of predators as required by law. However, as you cannot shoot seals in the dark or in inclement weather, this is not a valid reason for issuing a license.

Under the licensing scheme seals should only be shot as a last resort. Using Freedom of Information I discovered that only 13% of salmon farms use the predator exclusion nets needed to safely keep seals well away from the salmon in the cage nets. Exclusion nets are expensive to buy and require farms to employ the divers needed to install and maintain them. Sadly it is much cheaper and easier to pay for bullets to shoot seals than it is to pay to properly protect the salmon in their cage nets.

During this month monitors from Sea Shepherd UK have been stationed at several salmon netting station in Scotland. Below are three links to video of seal shooting incidents involving salmon netmen and recorded by Sea Shepherd in the last few weeks.

Seals are supposed to be shot only as a last resort to stop them taking salmon from the nets. This does not seem to be the case in these incidents.

Under the licensing scheme shooters are encouraged to recover the carcasses of shot seals to have them autopsied at the Scottish Rural College at Inverness. In the recorded incidents no attempt is made by the shooters to recover the carcasses of the shot seals.

Time and time again I have raised with your Department the fact that no-one officially polices the seal shooting licensing scheme. Before granting licenses no-one from Marine Scotland visits the sites to see if alternatives to shooting are being or could be used. Once a license is issued no-one goes to check that license conditions are being observed. Marine Scotland even relies on the honesty of the shooters themselves to accurately record and report the number of seals killed. When I tried to use FOI legislation to compare independent reports of specific seal shooting incidents against official records Marine Scotland refused to release the requested information and are still fighting for the right to keep that information out of the public domain.

I urge you to view the video on the links below and to order a review of the seal shooting licensing scheme in Scotland. The Scottish Government does not police the licensing scheme in any way and the scheme does little more than protect seal shooters from prosecution.

Yours sincerely,

John F. Robins,  
Save Our Seals Fund

Links to Sea Shepherd UK footage:

Crovie 2nd June 2015. Seal shot but apparently it was not interfering with salmon nets.

Thurso 20th June 2015. Dead seal with no attempt at recovery of carcass by the shooter.

Thurso 22nd June 2015. Seal shot but apparently it was not interfering with salmon nets.