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Animal Concern is a pressure group registered as a non-profit making Limited Company  
(Co. No. SC109126) established in 1988 as Animal Concern (Scotland) Ltd.  
It incorporates the Scottish Anti-Vivisection Society which was founded in 1876.

To all Animal Concern and ACAL supporters.

This one is really for those of you living in Scotland though if you live outside Scotland and have sympathetic contacts here please feel free to pass this email to them.

You will see below my email to all MSPs re the Scottish Parliament vote later today (Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup>) on amendments to the Animals and Wildlife (Penalties, Protections and Powers) (Scotland) Bill.

If you can please email your MSPs (you can contact them via this link if you wish: <https://www.writetothem.com/> ) before 1pm today and ask them if they got the email from Animal Concern and if they are going to participate in the debate and vote for the amendments which will increase protection of animals. You might also want to remind them that how they vote influences how you will vote in future.

If you don't read this email before the Parliamentary session starts you can still email your MSPs and ask if they participated and how they voted. Please copy any replies to me including any from MSPs who say they are self isolating and unable to vote from home.

Cheers4now,

John

PS: Remember you can watch the debate on the Scottish Parliament TV Channel on: <https://www.scottishparliament.tv/>

It should start sometime after 14.20 today, Wednesday 17th June.

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**Wednesday, 17 June 2020**

**The Animals and Wildlife (Penalties, Protections and Powers) (Scotland) Bill**

To all Members of the Scottish Parliament,

Dear MSP,

I write concerning amendments to the Animals and Wildlife (Penalties, Protections and Powers) (Scotland) Bill to be considered this afternoon at the Stage 3 debate on the Bill.

Some of you may be contacted by Animal Concern supporters within your constituency before or after the debate. I hope this email gives you some useful information on at least some of the amendments tabled.

One amendment is to make it illegal to shoot seals in Scotland. On May 18th in a letter to Gillian Martin MSP, Convenor of the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee, Mairi Gougeon MSP, Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment, said, “ ... ***there has been a lack of clarity from the US on the interpretation of these rules and what specific action needs to be taken by nations in order to comply. Officials have been actively pressing to expedite this process but this clarity has not been provided in a timely manner.***”

I don't know who told the Minister this was the case but I must differ. Any confusion and lack of clarity came from within the Scottish Government and the Cabinet Ministers and Departments which should have dealt with this before Ms Gougeon was first elected to the Parliament.

In March 2012, as Secretary of Save Our Seals Fund, I asked the US Government to use their Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) to ban the import of salmon from Scotland. The reason being that shooting seals is far cheaper than installing and maintaining seal exclusion nets (which I have sought to have made compulsory since the 1980s) thus giving Scottish salmon farmers an economic advantage over their US counterparts who have to invest in seal protection equipment.

Four years later the US Government announced the MMPA ban on importing fish from fisheries where seals are shot. I was chuffed when the US spokesperson mentioned my letter when making his announcement. He made it clear that unless a country made it illegal for commercial fisheries to deliberately harm or kill marine mammals the USA would not allow imports of any fish or fish products from that country after 1/1/2022. I made it even clearer when I wrote to relevant Government Ministers and told them if they wanted Scotland to be able to export as much as a jar of pickled herring to the USA after 1/1/2022 they had to make the deliberate killing of seals illegal.

I repeated this several times both directly to Government Ministers and in the media after Government Ministers continued to make misleading statements such as that attributed to Fergus Ewing in the Sunday Herald on 18th September 2016.

The article read; "(Mark) **Ruskell asked the government whether the Scottish salmon farming industry was compliant with a new US animal welfare regulation. The regulation says that "the harvesting nation must demonstrate it has prohibited the intentional mortality or serious injury of marine mammals in the course of commercial fishing operations"**".

***The rural economy minister, Fergus Ewing, replied by stressing that compliance with import regulations in another country was a matter for exporting companies."***

I hope you will support making the deliberate harming and killing of seals a criminal offence in Scotland. I should be pleased but I'm angry and ashamed that it has taken over 40 years of campaigning and the intervention of a foreign power to get to this stage. It is also sad that the killing is being stopped to support mainly foreign-owned filthy floating factory fish farms which cause more animal suffering and marine pollution than any industry I can think of.

Is there anyway the ban on killing seals could be introduced immediately? Salmon farmers have doubled their efforts to kill seals this year and may increase their killing rate even more if given time before the ban comes into force.

Perhaps Fergus Ewing has discussed this in his 21 meetings with salmon farm companies and 4 with the Scottish Salmon Producers Association? I could find out by doing an FOI trawl for the Minutes. Oh, I forgot, Fergus and his fish farming friends don't bother taking notes at their meetings.

Another amendment to the Bill seeks to ban mass killing of Mountain Hare on grouse moors. I believe the very dodgy motive for the killing is to reduce the number of ticks which might infect grouse chicks before they grow up and get shot. As far as I am aware there is no scientific evidence to back that claim. It also worries me as to what the ticks feed on when one of their main sources of blood is reduced. Grouse chicks? Deer or sheep? Hillwalkers and grouse beaters? Could culling Mountain Hare result in increased cases of Lyme Disease in humans?

Please vote for protection of Mountain Hares.

A year ago some organisations celebrated a victory in obtaining “protection” for beavers in Scotland. I did not celebrate because I didn’t see it as a victory. It wasn’t. Since then at least 87 beavers have been killed on Tayside under Government licence. I cannot come up with a foreign power to help get that banned. Can you please help the Scottish Government to do it?

There are lots of other issues needing addressed in the field of wild animal protection in Scotland. One is the SNH General Licencing scheme which gives people permission to kill unlimited numbers of many species of native wild birds simply by reading a License on the SNH website. No-one asks them why they are killing the birds, they don’t have to prove any need for the killing and they don’t have to tell anyone how many birds they kill. That is a scheme which is unfit for purpose and you should be embarrassed that you sit in a Parliament that refuses to do anything about it.

The non-ban on fox hunting is another area to be addressed. Hunters were given the opportunity to continue their sport by switching to drag hunting. They chose instead to flout the law and continue killing. A total ban is now long overdue.

You cannot be all things to all people and you don’t stop cruelty by trying to legitimise it through licensing. Sometimes you just have to say “***That’s enough. It stops now.***”.

Stay safe and well,

John F. Robins,  
Secretary of Animal Concern

PS I mean no criticism of Minister Gougeon. She holds an office I and others had been calling for the creation of for decades. The Scottish Government is to be commended for creating a Ministerial post to deal with protection of animals and the environment without the conflicting burden of also representing farming, fishery and forestry interests.

Minister Gougeon should not have inherited the seal shooting issue, it should have been dealt with before she entered Parliament. When it became a matter of urgency under her watch she deserved to be given accurate information on the background to the USA import ban.

What I cannot forgive her for is making me feel very old. If you pass her ban on seal shooting it will end a campaign I first became involved in six years before she was born!