

Statement from Jenny Green of The Hunt Saboteurs Association Seal Guardian Campaign.  
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We have observed Usan over many months for each of the past few years, and gathered evidence of illegal activity that we have handed to various authorities and stakeholders.

The three year ban on coastal wild salmon netting was unavoidable given that wild salmon numbers are at their lowest since records began. Scottish government had no other option than to impose this ban. They put it off for as long as they could, but finally had to come into line with the rest of Europe and honour their international conservation obligations.

Usan Salmon Fisheries aka the Scottish Wild Salmon Company are Scotland's largest wild salmon fishing company and have been taking wild salmon from Scottish waters for over forty years.

It is very relevant to note that Usan were fined tens of thousands by the HMRC last year for underreporting their catch - this means they lied about how many fish they were taking from the sea. Usan were also fined seven thousand last year by Scottish courts for breaching wild salmon netting regulations multiple times over many years (leaving their nets in the water out of permitted hours - these nets thus continued to illegally catch fish during 'close times'). So, caught out breaching salmon conservation legislation and caught out lying about how many fish they were landing; these are patterns of behaviour proven in court to have taken place over many years. Usan are now convicted wildlife criminals.

Why is nobody talking about the link? Wild salmon stocks are at an all-time low. Usan has lied about how many salmon they take from the sea. Usan has breached salmon conservation netting regulations over multiple years. Marine Scotland need to join the dots here.

Now there is to be a private meeting between Marine Scotland and Usan to discuss their netting the Ythan River this year and other issues.

This is very troubling, for a myriad of reasons:

- 1) Why is Marine Scotland entertaining a private meeting with wildlife criminals? Why are no other stakeholders invited to the meeting? What exactly is going to be discussed in private, and will the agreements they come to be made public?
- 2) The three year suspension is only for coastal netting; the suspension does not pertain to rivers / estuaries. This is understandable as a river suspension would impact the big estate fishing rights and that would never be tolerated because it would negatively impact angling tourism. So, salmon will still be caught in rivers, but will be tagged to track exact numbers caught. Usan has shown themselves to disregard regulations and are convicted wildlife criminals, so why should they be allowed to operate at all? They are already banned from coastal netting. Why shouldn't they be banned from netting full stop, seeing as they can't adhere to the laws? The salmon in the river Ythan are the same salmon that are swimming along the coast; they are just at a different geographical stage of their journey back to their home rivers for spawning. Usan are banned from catching the salmon in the sea, but these are the same salmon that are using the Ythan! So why isn't Usan banned from netting any salmon at all?
- 3) The Ythan is a hugely sensitive site in terms of the diversity of the wildlife it supports. In particular, Marine Scotland has already commissioned a report and had confirmed that the Ythan Estuary satisfies the requirements that are necessary for the site to be designated a seal

protection area. The Ythan is home to 26% of the entire east coast's grey seal population! According to government statistics, Usan shoot the greatest number of seals of any of the fisheries in Scotland. Why would Marine Scotland allow Scotland's most prolific seal killers to operate on a river that is officially recognised as being a seal haul-out site that requires protecting?

4) Usan will likely be holding their hands out for yet more compensation from the Scottish government if they are not allowed to net the Ythan. If Scottish government pay out, they'll be showing that crime does pay, and using public funds to pay criminals off. Marine Scotland should not use public money to pay a criminal organisation not to operate!