
MORAY FIRTH SEAL MANAGEMENT CODE OF PRACTICE

Version 1

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~~"A working document developed specifically to support the Moray Firth Pilot"~~

Compiled by:

Scottish Executive Seals Forum, Sea Mammal Research Unit, Association of Salmon Fishery Boards

1 Firearms Law and Safety

1.1 The Law in Relation to Firearms for Shooting Seals

The Conservation of Seals Act 1970 (the 1970 Act) provides for the killing of seals to prevent damage to fisheries and fishing nets by the owner or a nominated person or persons acting on their behalf. Section 1 (1) (b) of the 1970 Act specifies that no firearm may be used to shoot seals other than "*a rifle using ammunition with a muzzle energy not less than 600 foot pounds and a bullet weighing not less than 45 grains*". This effectively excludes any 0.22 rimfire rifles. Only centrefire rifles can be used, with the 0.22 Hornet using 45 grain bullets representing the lowest acceptable combination of bullet weight and energy.

The Conservation (Natural Habitats) Regulations 1994 prohibits the killing of mammals, including seals, using "*artificial light sources, devices for illuminating targets and sighting devices for night shooting comprising an electronic image magnifier or image converter*". This effectively eliminates night shooting of seals. The Deer (Scotland) Act 1996 defines night as being "*the period between the expiry of one hour after sunset and the beginning of the last hour before sunrise*".

1.2 Best Practice

On the basis of this legislation it is recommended that:

- ◆ A rifle of 0.243 calibre or above is normally used to shoot seals;
- ◆ It is acceptable to use a 0.22 centrefire rifle, as described at 1.1 above, at close range (within approximately 100m), or where a 0.243 rifle or larger is impractical from a public safety perspective;
- ◆ A sound moderator should be used;
- ◆ Ammunition designed to expand in a predictable manner is used;

- ◆ Solid ammunition should not be used for public safety and animal welfare reasons;
- ◆ Shooting should only be undertaken in the period between one hour before sunrise, and until one hour after sunset.

1.3 Nominated Marksmen

Any licence to shoot seals issued by the Scottish Executive under Section 10 (1) (c) (i) of the 1970 Act will list the persons nominated to undertake the shooting of seals. These Nominated Marksmen must possess an appropriate firearm and a suitable endorsement on their firearms certificate. No other persons are licensed to shoot seals. The details of these Nominated Marksmen will remain confidential under the Data Protection Act.

1.4 Firearms Safety

It is acknowledged that Nominated Marksmen will be experienced individuals but for the sake of clarity, the following safety steps should be followed:

ALWAYS

- ◆ Remain calm and unhurried when handling firearms;
- ◆ Handle a firearm at all times as if it were loaded;
- ◆ Carry out appropriate risk assessment (see 2.1);
- ◆ Ensure you have the correct ammunition for the firearm and it is clean and undamaged;
- ◆ Know how your rifle works, including disengaging of set triggers if fitted;
- ◆ Know the status of your rifle, i.e. bullet in the chamber, safety on etc. Do not be embarrassed to check the status of your rifle and safety catch, and do so frequently;
- ◆ Be aware of where the barrel is pointing. Do not point at anything that you do not intend to shoot, irrespective of load status;
- ◆ Leave loading the rifle until the last possible moment;
- ◆ When loading/unloading make sure muzzle is pointing in a safe direction. ***MOST ACCIDENTS OCCUR WHEN CHANGING THE STATE OF A RIFLE;***
- ◆ Unload your firearm before crossing any major obstacle (fence, stream or ditch) or whenever laying down a firearm, entering a building or vehicle or putting a firearm into a case;
- ◆ Pass a rifle with the muzzle pointing in a safe direction, and before giving or receiving a rifle make sure that all involved can see that it is unloaded, i.e. magazine is empty or removed, bolt open, chamber clear;
- ◆ Ensure your rifle bore is free from obstruction. When crawling, a purpose made muzzle cap, or a piece of tape or cling film, is strongly recommended. If the bore becomes obstructed, the rifle should be unloaded and cleaned using a pull-through;
- ◆ Be aware, when in close proximity to the rifle, of the effects of muzzle blast. Wear hearing protection when firing and ensure that others in close proximity also do so;
- ◆ After the shot, be aware of the status of your rifle. When moving forward make sure that other people stay behind the rifleman, in case a follow up shot is required;
- ◆ Always unload prior to carcass recovery;
- ◆ Ensure that firearms are securely stored and transported;

NEVER

- ◆ Put off the safety catch or touch the trigger unless you have a stable firing position and the rifle is pointing at the target;
- ◆ Have a loaded rifle in an enclosed space such as a vehicle or building (unless shooting from the vehicle);
- ◆ Carry ammunition other than that required for the rifle being used.

1.5 Zeroing and Accuracy

A Nominated Marksman should be able to demonstrate that both he and his rifle are capable of putting three shots in a 4-inch circle at 100m and 200m.

2 Guidance for Shooting Seals

2.1 Where to shoot seals

Shooting is only to be carried out within Management Areas detailed in the local Seal Management Plan. Salmon netmen may shoot seals in the vicinity of netting stations.

Before shooting seals a thorough risk assessment should be undertaken to avoid danger to the public. Particular attention must be paid to:

- ◆ Anglers;
- ◆ Boats, canoes and other water users;
- ◆ Walkers;
- ◆ SCUBA divers;
- ◆ Dolphins and whales;
- ◆ Other wildlife.

Also:

- ◆ Never fire at a target that does not have a safe backdrop;
- ◆ Shooting off an unstable platform is not recommended and should be avoided;
- ◆ If possible shoot from an elevated position.

2.2 When to Shoot Seals

To ensure public safety, good public relations and animal welfare seals should ideally be shot only in the following circumstances:

- ◆ Early morning when people are absent;
- ◆ Try and shoot seals when there is a good chance of recovering the carcass.

2.3 *How to Shoot Seals*

Before firing identify the species of seal.

Shot placement is concerned with:

- ◆ Achieving rapid death;
- ◆ Minimising suffering;
- ◆ Achieving carcass recovery wherever possible.

In the case of seals, the recommended shot is a head shot. Because the brain of a seal is a very small target (orange-sized), wherever possible shoot off a stable platform.

Every effort should be made to locate and humanely dispatch injured animals.

3 **Carcass Recovery and Disposal**

3.1 *Carcass Recovery*

You should attempt to recover the carcasses of all shot seals. Much detailed information can be gained from a seal carcass, including positive species identification, age, sex, diet etc. Even a carcass which has been in the water for several days should be retrieved wherever possible.

When you have a carcass to be recovered:

1. Wear suitable heavy-duty gloves;
2. Move seal carcass above the high water mark, away from water to a discreet location to avoid carcass being washed away and any risk to public health;
3. If necessary cover carcass;
4. Make careful note of its exact location;
5. After handling, wash and disinfect yourself thoroughly.

3.2 *Carcass Removal*

Please report details of any seal carcass including OS grid reference, site details and your telephone number and address to the following:

- **Isla Graham**, Sea Mammal Research Unit: **Tel.: 07770 735229**
OR:
- **Rob Harris**, Sea Mammal Research Unit: **Tel.: 07770 735421**

If after 1 day you have had no response from SMRU call:

- **Scottish Agricultural College Strandings Scheme**: **Tel: 01463 243030**

If you have problems disposing of seal carcasses seek advice from the local office of the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA).

4 Statutory Records and Returns

As a condition of a licence, the following details of all seals shot must be recorded on the Scottish Executive statutory return sheets (see page 6) provided to District Salmon Fishery Boards and netmen:

- ◆ Date;
- ◆ Time;
- ◆ Species of seal shot;
- ◆ Location;
- ◆ OS grid reference;
- ◆ History of carcass recovery.

5 Public Relations

Shooting of seals is an emotive subject and there may be significant public interest in this activity. It may also conflict with the interests of wildlife tourism operators. Therefore at all times nominated marksmen must consider the potential consequences of shooting a seal. In order to maintain good public relations the following steps should be considered:

1. Follow these best practice guidelines for shooting seals;
2. Maintain close liaison with the local police;
3. Maintain close liaison with the local representatives of Scottish Natural Heritage;
4. Maintain close liaison with local wildlife tourism operators;
5. Be aware of the aims of the local seal management plan and be prepared to explain these in polite and diplomatic terms to interested members of the public;
6. Always carry contact details where further information can be obtained by members of the public.

Enquiries can be directed to:

Ian Walker, Scottish Executive Wildlife & Habitats Division
Tel: 0131 244 6568

If the enquiries relate to specific local issues they will be redirected as appropriate.

6 Insurance

Appropriate public liability insurance should be carried by all employers of Nominated Marksmen. If shooting on their own account, Nominated Marksmen should carry their own insurance.

