

MINUTES OF THE 7th MEETING OF THE SEALS FORUM
FRIDAY 2nd MARCH 2007
SCOTLAND'S HOTEL, PITLOCHRY

Attendees

SEERAD, Marine Management Division (MMD)
SEERAD, Freshwater Fisheries and Aquaculture (FFA)
Seal Mammal Research Unit, University of St Andrews (SMRU),
Highlands & Islands Fishermen's Association
Fisheries Research Services
Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Scottish SPCA)
Marine Conservation Society (MCS)
Kyle of Sutherland District Salmon Fishery Board (DSFB)
Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC)
International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW)
Salmon Net Fishing Association
Scottish Natural Heritage
Seaprobe Atlantis
Atlantic Salmon Trust
Advocates for Animals
Wild Scotland
University of Aberdeen
Scottish Fishermen's Federation
British Divers Marine Life Resource
Shetland Aquaculture

Apologies

1. Apologies were intimated on behalf of SEERAD – Ecology and Research Division, SEERAD - Marine Group, SEERAD – Sea Fisheries, Scottish Quality Salmon, Glasgow University Marine Biological Station, Association of Salmon Fishery Boards, Scottish Anglers National Association.

Welcome & Introduction

2. The Chair welcomed everyone to the seventh meeting of the Seals Forum and outlined that the main focus would be on the recent reduction in common seal numbers and a possible review of seals legislation.

Minutes of the Previous Meeting and Matters Arising

3. The minutes of the 6th meeting were accepted.

4. The actions from the 6th meeting and the Working Group were reviewed. The majority had been completed or were discussed under the main agenda. On the outstanding item - SEERAD reported that it was currently awaiting a response from Lantra to a letter requesting that the seal management training course become part of the Fisheries Management SVQ framework as an optional unit, accredited by SQA.

The Moray Firth Seal Management Pilot

5. The Group was provided with a presentation on the second phase of the Moray Firth Seal Management Plan for 2006. The latest figures indicated that the number of seals shot by District Salmon Fishery Board (DSFBs) and salmon netmen combined were considerably lower than both the maximum number permitted under the SEERAD licence and the number shot in the first year. The associated research project monitoring the presence and impact of seals in rivers was also producing interesting results. The next year would include further testing of non-lethal seal management measures.

Action: SEERAD to meet with interested parties to explore options for a second seal management pilot.

Local Reductions in Common Seals Numbers

6. The Group was provided with two presentations providing some views on the recent reduction in common seal numbers in three local areas:- Shetland, Orkney and Firth of Tay. It was agreed that verification of these reported reductions and investigation into their possible causes should be a priority area for future seal monitoring and research.

7. SEERAD reported that The Conservation of Seals (Scotland) Order 2007, which was the subject of a short consultation amongst Forum members in January, had now been laid before the Scottish Parliament and was due to come into force on 23 March 2007.

Action: SMRU to produce a paper summarising possible research options for circulation to members. SEERAD, SNH and SMRU to consider as a priority the options for future monitoring of common seal numbers, research into possible causes and potential funding sources.

Possible Review of Seals Legislation

8. The Group was provided with a presentation offering one view on the need for changes in The Conservation of Seals Act 1970. It was agreed, following some discussion, to ask the Working Group initially to consider in more detail what a possible review of the 1970 Act might involve and whether the production of interim guidance on some issues might be useful and to report back. (The possibility that a specific group might be required to deal with this particular issue will be kept in mind.)

Action: SEERAD to seek dates for the Working Group during May and to recruit additional members for the Group from the welfare and enforcement sectors.

Seal Research Strategy Update

9. The Group were presented with an updated version of the SEERAD Marine Mammal Research Strategy, including seal research. It was agreed that this latest version should be further revised to take account of the new research priority on the issue of recent reductions in local common seal numbers.

Action: SEERAD to revise the strategy in light of any new priorities arising out of research into possible causes of the recent reductions in common seal numbers.

AOB

10. SEERAD reported that the questions for Special Committee on Seals (SCOS) in 2007 would largely be informed by the new priority on common seals. If Forum members had additional suggestions for questions they should submit them to the Secretary before May.

11. SEERAD reported that it intended to review the original Forum membership since 5 years had passed since its first meeting.

Action: SEERAD to draft SCOS questions for consideration by the Working Group. SEERAD to review Forum membership.

Date of next meeting

12. This was provisionally scheduled for March 2008 in Pitlochry, but this would be confirmed.

SEERAD – MMD

March 2007