

MINUTES OF THE 8th MEETING OF THE SEALS FORUM
FRIDAY 25th APRIL 2008
THE ROYAL GEORGE HOTEL, PERTH

Attendees

Scottish Government Marine Management Division (MMD)
SG Freshwater Fisheries & Aquaculture (FFA)
SG Ecological Adviser
SG Sea Fisheries Conservation
Sea Mammal Research Unit
Fisheries Research Services Freshwater Labs
Atlantic Salmon Trust
Scottish Natural Heritage
Scottish Salmon Producers Organisation (SSPO)
Advocates for Animals
Lothian & Borders Police
Kyle of Sutherland District Salmon Fishery Board (DSFB)
International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW)
Hebridean Marine National Park Partnership (for Seaprobe Atlantis)
University of Aberdeen
British Divers Marine Life Rescue
Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC)
Salmon Net Fishermen's Association (SNFA)
Scottish Anglers National Association
Association of Salmon Fishery Boards (ASFB)
Scottish Association for Marine Science (SAMS)

Apologies

Apologies were offered on behalf of Marine Conservation Society and Wild Scotland.

Welcome & Introductions

The Chair welcomed existing members to the eighth meeting of the Seals Forum and outlined that the main focus would be on plans for the forthcoming Moray Firth conference, proposed guidance on current seal legislation and possible future changes in seal legislation.

The Chair also introduced a new member representing Scottish Association for Marine Science, who had been invited to join following the resignation of existing members from Universities of Aberdeen and Glasgow. The Chair thanked the resigning members for their involvement.

Minutes of the Previous Meeting and Matters Arising

The minutes of the 7th meeting were agreed by correspondence.

The actions from the 7th meeting and the Working Group were reviewed. The majority had been completed or were discussed under the main agenda. In respect of two items – investigation of common seal reduction and seal disease outbreak in Denmark - update papers had been circulated in advance of the meeting – i.e. ‘*Workplan and SMRU projects relating to common seal decline*’ and ‘*Update on respiratory disease in harbour seals in Sweden and Denmark in 2007*’ .

SMRU suggested that a brief regular item be included on the agenda providing an update on seal population trends. It was agreed this was a good way of keeping members up to date.

Hebridean Partnership queried Forum membership and asked that it be reviewed. MMD explained that membership of the Forum aimed to provide a balance between stakeholders and that a review of membership had already been registered as an action point for the future.

Action: MMD to include a regular agenda item on seal population trends.

Action: MMD to review Forum membership.

The Moray Firth Seal Management Plan Conference

The Group were issued with a draft paper providing MMD’s initial programme for a major conference planned to take place on 9th June 2008 in Inverness. MMD emphasised that the aim of the conference was to disseminate best practice, drawing on the experiences of those with direct involvement in the Plan and focusing on the successes and failures, with a view to publishing something. It was agreed that the conference would be worthwhile and that attendance should be encouraged both locally and across Scotland. The University of Aberdeen, SMRU and FRS agreed to consider possible field trips in the Moray Firth Area to be run in association with the conference.

Action: Forum members to provide contact details for potential invitees to the conference to MMD.

Action: University of Aberdeen, SMRU and FRS to consider and arrange suitable field trips.

Action: ASFB, SNFAS, SSPO to circulate the conference invitation to their members and encourage attendance by DSFB members, salmon netmen and aquaculture interests.

Draft Guidance on the Interpretation of Conservation of Seals Act 1970 (CoSA 1970)

The Group was provided with a paper developed from discussions at the Seals Working Group, which sought to clarify **existing legislation** in relation to the netmen’s defence and, particularly, the definitions of ‘vicinity’ and ‘fishing nets and tackle’. There was considerable discussion of the guidance and a desire in some quarters for additional restrictions to be

included. MMD reaffirmed that, since the intention of the guidance was to clarify existing legislation only, it could not exceed the restrictions set by that legislation. The proper place for discussion of any additional measures was in the context of a review of The Conservation of Seals Act 1970. There was also a desire that a definition of the term 'fisheries' be included in the guidance. MMD agreed to aim to issue the final guidance in July.

- Action:** Forum members to provide MMD with any additional written comments:
- position?**
- a) **Would the interim guidance be an improvement on the current position? (Include reasons for your views)**
 - b) **Are there good/best practice issues over and above the legal definitions that could be developed separately by the Seals Working Group?**
 - c) **Identify any issues that cannot be included in this current guidance but which may be considered as part of the development of new Marine legislation.**

Action: MMD to consider inclusion of a definition of the term 'fisheries' in the guidance and to aim to issue a final version of the guidance in July.

Review of the Conservation of Seals Act 1970 (CoSA 1970)

The Group was provided with a paper developed from discussions at the last Forum and in the Seals Working Group which set out some options for a review of the legislation to be taken forward as part of the consultation process on the Scottish Marine Bill. It was recognised that CoSA 1970 was operating in a very different environment from that of 1970 and agreed that doing nothing was no longer an option. The Group broadly endorsed the main parameters of the proposed options but naturally differed about specific options. They also suggested some additions to the paper, including a review of the close season periods.

MMD will submit a revised set of options for a review of CoSA 1970 to Scottish Ministers, who will decide whether or not to include any of the proposals discussed in the forthcoming consultation on the Scottish Marine Bill. In making their decision, they will take the diverse views of Forum members into account.

Action: MMD to submit a revised set of options to Scottish Ministers for their consideration as part of the Scottish Marine Bill.

Date of next meeting

This was provisionally scheduled for spring 2009 but the detailed arrangements would be confirmed.

**Marine Directorate – MMD
June 2008**

