

E-MAIL FROM: John F. Robins, Campaigns Consultant,
Animal Concern, Post Office Box 5178, Dumbarton G82 5YJ.
Tel. 01389-841-639, Mobile: 07721-605521.

E-MAIL: animals@jfrobins.force9.co.uk website: <http://www.animalconcern.org/>
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.

Dear Chief Executive,

My colleague Don Staniford of the Global Alliance Against Industrial Aquaculture has provided me with copies of the letters and e-mails he has received from British retailers regarding the sale of Scottish salmon supplied by farms where the shooting of seals takes place.

I have been working on this issue since the 1980s and it makes me very sad to see how little many retailers of Scottish farmed salmon know about how the product is produced. Some retailers do not seem to know the difference between predator exclusion nets and tensioned secondary cage nets.

Secondary nets are fitted to the outside of the inner cage net frames and are kept tensioned to stop seals pushing the cage nets in and taking a bite out of a salmon. The big problem is that this type of system allows seals to get up close and personal with the farm stock causing panic and stress in the salmon which swim to the other side of the cage net when they see a seal approaching. Secondary cage nets do not allow salmon farmers to meet their legal obligation to protect the welfare of their stock as required under the Animal Health & Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006.

Predator exclusion nets are used by around 15% of farms. They surround the farm some distance away from the main cage nets and, as long as they are kept properly tensioned and cleaned, they should keep seals and other predators well away from the salmon without entanglement of wildlife and with no loss of water flow through the farm cages. If operated properly this system allows salmon farmers to meet their legal obligation to protect the welfare of their salmon under the Animal Health & Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006.

Successive Scottish Governments, at the expense of the Scottish marine environment and the wildlife which inhabit it, have bent over backwards to accommodate and promote the largely Norwegian owned salmon farming industry in Scotland. Rather than insist that all Scottish salmon farms go to the expense of deploying properly tensioned and maintained predator exclusion nets the Scottish Government issues licenses under Part 6 of the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 allowing salmon farmers to shoot seals for the "Protection of Health and Welfare" of their stock. There's a wee problem with this. Unless salmon farmers have found a sharpshooter who can shoot seals 24/7 no matter what the weather or sea conditions they simply cannot meet the requirements of the Animal Health & Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006.

Another myth perpetuated by the Scottish Government, the salmon farming industry, most retailers and even the RSPCA Assured scheme is that seals are only shot as a last resort after all non-lethal alternatives have been exhausted. If only circa 15% of salmon farms are using predator exclusion nets 85% of salmon farms are not shooting seals as a last resort.

In Shetland salmon farming company, Grieg Seafood, installed predator exclusion nets after a seal damaged cage nets allowing over £1m worth of stock to escape. From killing 50 seals four years ago they now hope to have a zero kill rate this year. This shows that predator exclusion nets work.

Most salmon farms use acoustic seal scarers and many retailers hold this up as a very good thing. While I agree it is much better than shooting seals I have grave reservations about using acoustic scarers as these can have severe adverse side effects on the dolphins, porpoises and whales on whose habitat salmon farms squat.

For over thirty years I have, without success, tried to persuade salmon producers, salmon retailers and the politicians who regulate the industry that salmon farming must become a “seal friendly” industry. I have failed to do that. Indeed the salmon farming industry in Scotland cannot even claim to be dolphin friendly. Tuna retailers know only too well that being wildlife friendly is very important to consumers.

If salmon producers, retailers and regulators continue to refuse to adopt all available wildlife friendly farming techniques then the only way forward for wildlife protection is to make consumers fully aware that Scottish farmed salmon is not wildlife friendly.

As major buyers of farmed salmon you are in a position to tell your suppliers that you will only continue to buy from them if they install and maintain seal exclusion nets to stop seals getting close to the cage nets containing the salmon.

Until that happens across the industry we have no choice but to tell the public that when they buy Scottish salmon, including RSPCA Assured Scottish salmon, they are very likely to be paying for bullets to shoot seals.

Yours sincerely,

John F. Robins,
Secretary to Animal Concern and the Save Our Seals Fund

PS Some retailers seem to be more out of touch than others. Earlier this month one claimed that their salmon suppliers could only shoot seals “...as a last resort, in keeping with the legislative requirement of the Conservation of Seals Act 1970.” I won’t embarrass them by telling you who it is that doesn’t realise the Conservation of Seals Act 1970 was replaced in Scotland by Part 6 of the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 but next time you are in Tesco look out for staff members wearing hot pants and flares, sporting mullet haircuts and playing disco music over the Tannoy.