

E-MAIL FROM: John F. Robins, Secretary, Save Our Seals Fund (SOSF), C/O Animal Concern, Post Office Box 5178, Dumbarton G82 5YJ. Tel: 01389-841-639, Mobile: 07721-605521. Fax: 0870-7060327. SOSF is a recognised Scottish charity: RCNo. SC025489.

E-MAIL: [sosf@jfrobins.force9.co.uk](mailto:sosf@jfrobins.force9.co.uk) website: <http://www.saveoursealsfund.org/>

I'm afraid the Rural Affairs Committee at the Scottish Parliament has effectively killed our petition calling for a ban on the shooting of seals in Scottish waters. You can see the Committee discussing the petition on the link below and read an extract from the meeting minute below that.

I will now be preparing a new Freedom of Information request to find out if there is a shred of truth in some of the statements made by members of the Committee.

They all seem to have ignored the statement by the Governments own Special Committee on Seals who told the Petitions Committee that seal shooting is not a last resort and that cost saving is the reason non-lethal methods are not being used.

I must admit I am looking for a brick wall to bang my head against as that would be easier than trying to get a politician (or an RSPCA Freedom Food official) to grasp the very basic principal that if you do not use proper predator exclusion nets to keep seals well away from salmon farms then you cannot claim that shooting seals is only done as a last resort.

Please do all you can to inform the public that if they buy Scottish salmon, including RSPCA endorsed Scottish salmon, this Xmas they will be paying for bullets to shoot seals.

Cheers 4 now,

John

You can watch the Committee Meeting here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-I5-DPgU-lk>

Here's an extract from the Minute of the Meeting:

**Scottish Parliament Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee 10 December 2014.**

Convener: Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)

Deputy convener: Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP)

Attending Committee members: Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab), Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con), Cara Hilton (Dunfermline) (Lab), Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD), Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP), Michael Russell (Argyll and Bute) (SNP), Dave Thompson (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP).

Clerk to the committee: Lynn Tullis.

### **Save Our Seals Fund (PE1519):**

The Convener: Agenda item 3 is consideration of PE1519, by John F Robins, on behalf of the Save Our Seals Fund. The petition calls on the Scottish Parliament

“to urge the Scottish Government to stop issuing licences permitting salmon farming, salmon netting and salmon angling interests to shoot and kill seals in Scottish waters and instead require that salmon farmers either move their farms into on-shore tank systems or legally require marine salmon farmers to install and maintain the high-strength, high tension predator exclusion nets they require to meet their legal obligation under the Animal Health & Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 to protect their stock from the attention of predators. We further ask that the Scottish Parliament ask the Scottish Government to legislate to close down all salmon netting stations in Scottish waters thus allowing tens of thousands of Atlantic Salmon and sea trout to return to their native rivers to breed.”

By the looks of it, our discussion will be a catch-all one that will cover more than just seals.

I refer members to the accompanying paper, invite comments and seek agreement on the way forward. Who wants to kick off?

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): I am happy to comment, convener. As members will recall, we gave the issue considerable consideration during our consideration of the Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Bill, and my recollection is that we all came to the conclusion that, although we accepted that certain concerns had been expressed about the issue, we were content that the steps being taken by aquaculture practitioners were as robust and practical as they could be and that the shooting of seals happened only in extremis. Personally, I was satisfied with that, and I am not sure that our continuing the petition will do anything to resolve the situation. In short, given our consideration of the Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Bill, I see no future in continuing the petition.

The Convener: Do other members wish to comment?

Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): Very briefly, convener. I concur entirely with Alex Fergusson. The evidence that the petitioner gave the Public Petitions Committee, which I have read, in no way allayed my concerns about the petition. For a start, a number of what seemed to be unsubstantiated claims about the number of seals being shot were made. As a result, I tend to agree with Mr Fergusson.

Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP): Given that a number of strands to the petition have, I reckon, been properly addressed, I am minded to close it. Marine Scotland has adequately or satisfactorily addressed the seal control issue, and the salmon industry is evolving, with the increased use of high-tension predator exclusion nets and the introduction and roll-out of onshore tank systems, which the committee saw when it visited Lochaber. That is another aspect of the petition, which, as I said, contains a number of strands.

The only issue raised in the petition that has not been satisfactorily addressed is that of the salmon netting stations, but the committee still has to look at that issue in light of the report of the wild fisheries review. Given that a fair bit of work has already been done on the issues, I am, as I said, minded to close the petition.

Michael Russell (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): There are two questions to address here. First of all, the law is doing everything possible to avoid the killing of seals, but is the law itself being flouted or not observed in any significant way? I do not think that the petitioner has presented any evidence that that is the case; if he has any, he should present it not only to the Parliament but to the police, because it is an offence to do what he has suggested is being done.

The second question is whether the law needs to be changed to protect seals. That is a legitimate campaign, but it is not the campaign that the petitioner seems to be pursuing. He seems to be pursuing a campaign based on the law being flouted, and if he has brought no evidence of that forward, we should just close the petition. That said, we should, as we continue with our work, bear in mind whether the law is being flouted and whether a better law can be found.

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): I am persuaded by others' arguments that the petition should be closed. I should also point out that we will be looking at the wild fisheries review and that regulations issued under the Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Act 2013 can be amended as appropriate by ministers. I therefore see no argument for keeping the petition open.

The Convener: Perhaps I can sum up members' views. As we know, the national marine plan contains a section on aquaculture, which covers predators such as seals; the salmon netting issue is going to come up in secondary legislation next week; and the wild fisheries review has taken considerable evidence on the matter. All of that shows that we are taking considerable interest in the question of seals in both the natural environment and man-made structures and that we are ensuring that it is taken into account. Therefore, I recommend that we close the petition and maintain our interest in the matter, as has been suggested. Are we agreed? Members indicated agreement.