

PRESS RELEASE ISSUED BY ANIMAL CONCERN 28th June 2020 @ 10am

Animal Concern has asked MSPs to take urgent action to stop a possible mass slaughter of seals during the next six months. Recent changes to wildlife protection laws will make it illegal for salmon farmers to shoot seals after the end of January next year. Campaigners fear fish farmers will use the six months they have left to kill as many seals as they can. The law was changed to protect lucrative exports of salmon to the USA which would have been banned from next year if the Scottish Government did not make seal killing illegal.

While welcoming the ban he has been campaigning for over the last forty years, John Robins of Animal Concern wants Government to close the loophole he thinks will result in our seas running red with the blood of shot seals.

He said; “The shooting ban should have been brought in with immediate effect. Fearing a ban was coming seal shooters have already doubled their kill rate this year. Now they have a deadline it could become a very deadly line for seals in Scottish waters. I’ve asked the Government to immediately rescind existing seal shooting licences and to refuse to issue any new licenses. Given the close, secretive relationship between Government Minister Fergus Ewing and the salmon farming industry, I hold out little hope of success. We could be on the verge of a wildlife massacre for which our Government Ministers should feel guilty and very ashamed. ”

John F. Robins, Secretary and Campaigns Consultant, Animal Concern,
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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.

To all Members of the Scottish Parliament,

Dear Member of the Scottish Parliament,

I hope I find you safe and well and doing your best to help us all stay that way.

I have been told today by Marine Scotland that due to amendments to the Animals and Wildlife (Penalties, Protections and Powers) (Scotland) Bill which were passed last week; “***It is currently likely that seal licensing will cease at the end of this round of licensing at the end of January 2021, ...***”.

This raises cause for grave concern. It has already been noted that the number of seals killed by salmon farming interests has almost doubled in the last few months and, now that salmon farmers know the date from which they can no longer legally continue to kill seals, it would not surprise me if the seal killing rate increases greatly during the next six months.

I ask you to please persuade/force the Scottish Government to bring in an immediate moratorium on the shooting of seals to cover the period from now until the end of January 2021. All current seal shooting licences should be rescinded and no new licences issued.

The forthcoming ban was not brought in because the Government wants to protect seals. It has been scheduled, very much at the last minute, to protect salmon farmers who will lose their access to the lucrative market in the USA if the Scottish Government continues to allow the legal killing of any seals by any part of our commercial fishery and aquaculture industries after March 2021.

You may hear an argument that this ban has been a surprise to the salmon farming industry and that they have had little time to prepare for it. That, quite simply, is total nonsense.

This ban is not a surprise to either the industry or the Government. I was one of many campaigners who, in 2012, asked the US to use their Marine Mammal Protection Act to ban the import of fish from countries which allow the killing of any marine mammals by fishery or aquaculture industries. Indeed when the US Government announced the ban on importation of fish from nations where marine mammal persecution was legally allowed, my letter to the US Government was specifically mentioned. This was on 11th August 2015, nearly 5 years ago.

The US statement was clear. Governments had to make it illegal to kill seals and other marine mammals if any fish from that country were to be imported into the USA after 2021.

Knowing a ban must come, some parts of the industry invested in seal exclusion nets to eliminate any need for lethal control. However the Scottish Government muddied the waters by making several ludicrously inaccurate statements including that it was up to individual producers to stop killing seals if they wanted to continue selling to the USA. On numerous occasions since the ban was announced I have made it clear to Government Departments and Ministers that without a legal ban on seal killing the US would not allow as much as a jar of pickled Scottish herring into the country.

I understood the situation and some would say I'm not the brightest coin in the collection. How come highly educated and well-paid Government employees and the Ministers they were paid to advise did not appear to have a Scooby Doo about what was going on?

No more excuses. Ban the killing right now or, over the next six months, the blood of hundreds, if not thousands, of seals will be on your hands.

Yours sincerely,

John F. Robins,
Animal Concern