

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, founded in 1876.

RANTING ROBINS

There are a few things on my rant list today. Most of them courtesy of the Scottish Government.

In the 2018 Animal Concern Annual Report I said the Scottish Government and its Ministers are far too close to big industries and landowners making huge profits from killing our native wild animals and polluting our natural environment. Some people didn't believe me.

On 1st June 2020 The Ferret (on-line investigative journalism co-op) published an article based on papers obtained under FOI legislation by Christine Richards, a campaigner from Argyll. The article revealed that in four years as Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Tourism, Fergus Ewing has had 21 meetings with salmon farm companies and 4 with the Scottish Salmon Producers Association.

None of the meetings were Minuted. When Ms Richards asked why not, Murdo MacLeod, a senior civil servant at Marine Scotland*, said he had consulted colleagues who "**... stipulated that it is not normal practice to keep written records of meetings between the Cabinet Secretary and the fish farm companies, because the parties attending these meetings do not consider it necessary.**"

The Government issued a statement saying it was the responsibility of officials, not Ministers, to arrange for meetings to be recorded. In response the Public and Commercial Services Union for civil service staff, said of Fergus Ewing, "**... blaming the civil servants that work for you is an abdication of responsibility and very un-ministerial.**"

We have known and shown for many years that elected Ministers **and** Government employees hate Freedom of Information laws because they allow the people who pay their wages to keep an eye on what they are doing. Fergus Ewing is out of order here but so too are the civil servants involved.

I am sure some good politicians have been made to look total idiots by the actions of civil servants. I have doubts about who runs the country – people we elect and who hold office for a few years or civil service mandarins with decades to build themselves into the bricks of the establishment.

Apart from showing total contempt for the laws of this country, civil servants and Government Ministers who collude to protect companies accused of animal cruelty and environmental damage on a massive scale, leave themselves at great risk. If no records are kept how do we know that people are not leaving these meetings with bulky brown envelopes stuffed into their pockets?

*Marine Scotland is not a conservation charity but the misleading name for the Scottish Government Department for Over-Fishing and Filthy Floating Factory Fish Farms.

We won a campaign this month. In March 2012 I asked the US Government to use their Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) to ban the import of salmon from Scotland. Four years later the US Government announced a MMPA ban on the import of fish from fisheries where seals are shot. I was chuffed when the US spokesperson mentioned my letter when making his announcement.

I wrote to Scot Gov making it clear what they must do before March 2021 if Scotland was to be able to export as much as a jar of pickled herring to the USA after 1st January 2022. Civil servants at Marine Scotland and Ministers taking their advice ignored me and went off chasing red herrings.

They would get exemptions for our salmon farmers. Farmers wanting to export to the US only had to fit seal exclusion nets to their salmon cages. Salmon farmers had to act, not politicians. I wrote to the Ministers and told them they were wrong, wrong and wrong again. They ignored me. Until now.

The Scottish Government has suddenly realised I knew what I was talking about and are rushing through an amendment to the Animals and Wildlife Bill to ban shooting of seals in Scotland.

In a letter to the Committee working on the Bill, Mairi Gougeon, Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment, said “ ... **there has been a lack of clarity from the US on the interpretation of these rules and what specific action needs to be taken by nations in order to comply. Officials have been actively pressing to expedite this process but this clarity has not been provided in a timely manner.**” Absolute garbage. The statement from the US Government was perfectly clear and I translated it into terms a budgie would understand.

I am furious. After 40 years of campaigning we had to use a foreign government to force ours to make it illegal to shoot seals. I'm also furious that the ban is not immediate. Knowing it was coming – perhaps Fergus told them during their secret meetings – salmon farmers have greatly increased their kill rate to get shot of as many seals as they can before it becomes a crime.

A year ago some organisations celebrated a victory in obtaining protection for beavers in Scotland. We did not celebrate because I didn't see it as a victory. It wasn't. Since then at least 87 beavers have been killed under Government licence. What foreign power must we use to get that banned?

Despite our exposing the cruelty and absurdity of the Islay goose “management” scheme it continues unabated.

There's still no sign of licensing of grouse moors and the mass slaughter of native birds under the SNH General Licensing shambles continues unabated.

On 11th September 2018 a BBC documentary exposed the horrific export of days-old calves from Scotland to Europe. I immediately asked the P&O Ferries CEO to stop taking calves from Scotland to Ireland on the first leg of their journey to an unknown fate. She banned the lorries within hours but exporters, backed by Fergus Ewing, found other routes. Compassion In World Farming are now having to seek a judicial review in a bid to get this sick trade stopped. Sometimes I'm ashamed to be a Scot.

The Chinese Government is sending all Chinese students in the UK Covid-19 kits. These include packs of traditional Chinese medicines which could contain prohibited animal parts such as tiger bone, bear bile and pangolin scales. On 20th April I asked Customs to check the contents of these packs. Despite chasing them last month I'm still waiting for a response. Once again I'm going to have to use FOI laws because a Government Department won't do its job.

Those of you not on our e-mail list won't have received my request to write to Scottish politicians about some of the issues above. If in Scotland write to your MSPs. Postal address is The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh EH99 1SP. If you don't know the names of your MSPs just address it to MSPs for (and then your Post Code). If outside Scotland write to Nicola Sturgeon, First Minister, Scottish Government, St. Andrew's House, Regent Road, Edinburgh EH1 3DG.

In your letter politely ask for a ban on the export of animals, an immediate total ban on killing seals and beavers, a full review of the principal of having General Licenses allowing unrestricted culling of birds, a moratorium and review of all current culling schemes. We want a full review of the way we treat animals and the environment in Scotland.

I was going to flag up concerns I have about some internet animal scams but I'm out of space again. I'll do it later in an e-mail to our on-line supporters. If you want to be kept up to date on our work via the internet please send me an e-mail. I will not swamp you with begging letters or calls to sign myriads of all but useless petitions.

If you can, please return your voting form ASAP. Try not to get stressed out and don't take any risks.

All the very best, *John* John F. Robins, Secretary and Campaigns Consultant, Animal Concern 13/6/20