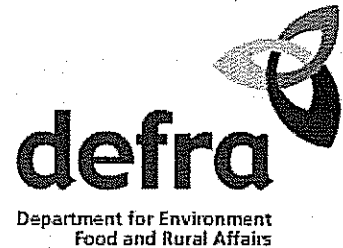


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**Our ref:** MC 75484

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**From Joan Ruddock MP**  
Parliamentary Under Secretary - Climate Change, Biodiversity and Waste

*Dear Caroline,*

Thank you for your letter of 13 March to Jonathan Shaw about the shooting of UK seals. I am replying as the Minister responsible for this policy area.

Since the establishment of separate administrations within the UK, seal conservation is a devolved issue and enquiries about seals in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland should be directed to the Scottish Government, Welsh Assembly Government or Department of the Environment (Northern Ireland) as appropriate.

Of GB populations, 85% of common seals and 90% of grey seals (the 2 species covered by the Conservation of Seals Act 1970) occur in Scotland.

Seals are protected in England, Scotland and Wales by the Conservation of Seals Act 1970. In Northern Ireland, common and grey seals are protected by the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985. The Act also allows the Secretary of State devolved powers, if it appears necessary for the proper conservation of seals, to prohibit by way of an order the killing, injuring or taking of either or both the above seal species in any area specified in the order. There is currently such an order (The Conservation of Seals (England) Order 1999) protecting common and grey seals which in effect extends their close season on the east coast of England. As this is where the vast majority of English populations of seals are located, any extension to the Order would have minimal if any effect.

Fishermen are permitted to shoot a seal during the close season or in an area where there is a killing or taking prohibition as prescribed in an order, to prevent it from causing damage to their fishing tackle or net or to fish in their net, provided the seal is in the vicinity of said equipment at that time. Any person wanting to shoot seals must use an appropriate firearm and possess a firearms certificate which includes permission to shoot seals. This provision allows the legitimate control of individual seals where they are causing damage and does not permit more widespread control.

Several marine Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) have been created around the UK specifically to protect seals, amongst other species. The Government has also just published a draft Marine Bill, which was launched by The Secretary of State Hilary Benn on the 4<sup>th</sup> April.

There is no evidence to suggest that the activities of fishermen are having any adverse effect on seals populations or on the welfare of seals in English waters.

With best wishes;

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'JR', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

**JOAN RUDDOCK**