



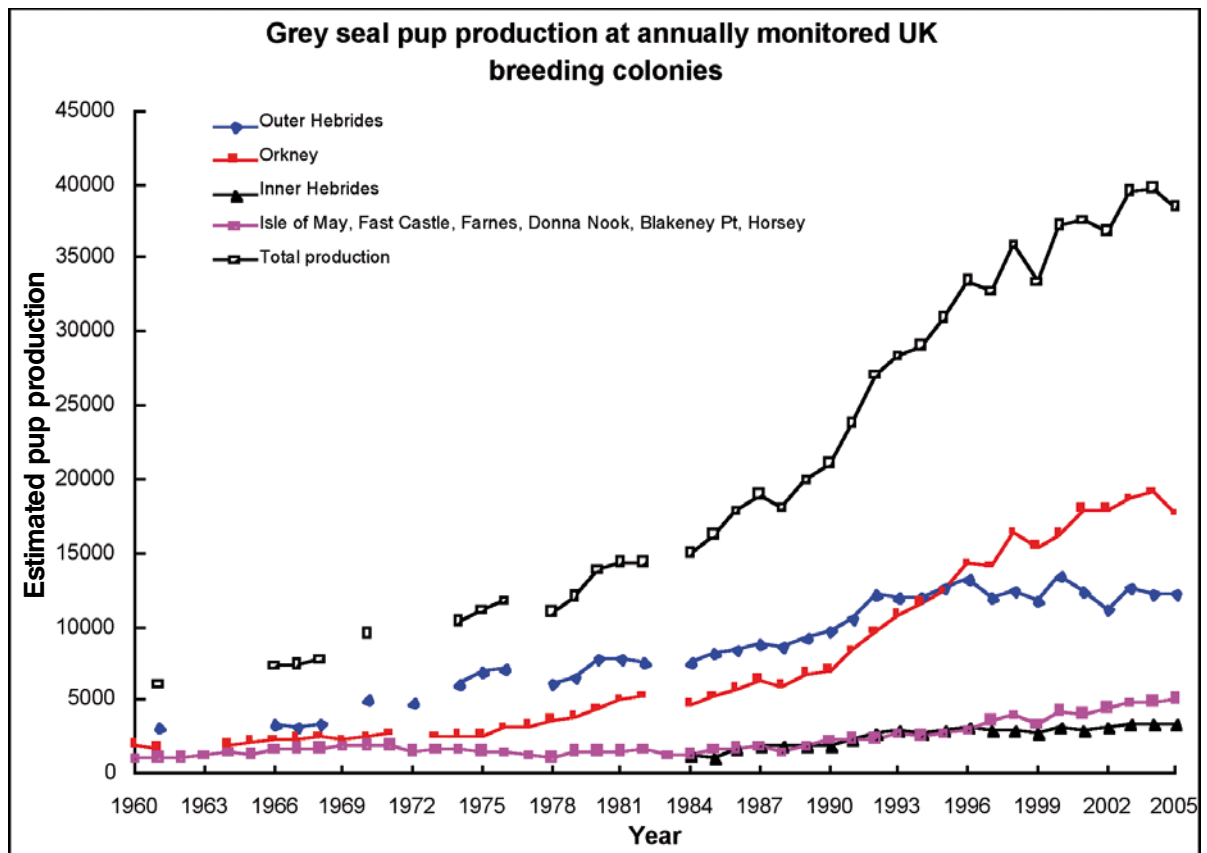
The Special Committee on Seals (SCOS) Process - How It Works

The Conservation of Seals Act 1970 places a duty on the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) to provide “relevant and timely advice” about the management of UK seal populations (see Conservation of Seals Act leaflet for details). The Special Committee on Seals (SCOS) was therefore set up to facilitate this process. The “SCOS Advice”, which is given annually, is based on scientific information provided mostly by the Sea Mammal Research Unit (SMRU), University of St Andrews. The SMRU was originally created to ensure that

NERC was able to provide this advice, and this remains a central role of SMRU today. NERC provides strategic funding to assist SMRU to carry out the survey and research that forms the basis of the advice.

Questions to SCOS

Each year the Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department (SEERAD) and the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) table a series of questions relating to the status of the UK’s harbour (or common) and





grey seal populations, including specific queries on current issues of interest to a wide range of stakeholders. In order to answer these questions, information on the distribution and abundance of each species of seal, their population structure and the types and quantities of prey they eat is needed. Detailed answers are provided in the SCOS advice document, drafted by SMRU. These are supported by a collection of Briefing Papers that are written by the scientists actively involved in the under-pinning research. They provide up-to-date information on both completed research and work in progress and the additional detail necessary to understand the background to the advice.

Membership of SCOS

Members of SCOS include the Chief Executive of NERC, the Director of SMRU, a Secretary (from NERC), a Chairperson, and a selection of nationally and internationally renowned vertebrate population biologists and experts in conservation management. The Chief Executive of NERC appoints members of the Committee and membership usually lasts for four years.

The SCOS Meeting

The annual SCOS meeting is usually held at SMRU in early September. The technical content of the Advice and Briefing Papers is discussed and amended where necessary. Once adopted, the Advice is then used by SEERAD and Defra to develop policy.

The agreed version of the Advice, with the supporting Briefing Papers, known as the “SCOS Report”, is also posted on the SMRU website (<http://www.smru.st-and.ac.uk/>), from where it can be downloaded.

