

Marine Mammal Scientific Support Research Programme MMSS/001/11

MR4:
Report

Provision of an advice function to support regulators and appropriate regulatory bodies on matters concerning marine mammals

Sea Mammal Research Unit
Report to
Scottish Government

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Editorial Trail

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1 Introduction

SMRU have had a close working relationship with various departments within Marine Scotland as well as with Scottish Natural Heritage and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee. This has previously been in the form of either informal discussions for short or easily answered questions or structured formal research contracts to answer more demanding or time consuming questions. In developing the MMSS 001/11 research programme Marine Scotland identified a need for a flexible form of advice service that would be intermediate between these two approaches. It was required to still respond rapidly to new and emerging issues but to also be able to call on SMRU staff to respond to any questions related to marine mammals. This task therefore aimed to deliver effective and timely advice (based on the best available information) to Marine Scotland and other public bodies upon request. The advice is based on the best available information to support Scottish Government requirements on issues relating to marine mammals and marine renewable developments.

- The amount of staff time required to support this advice service has varied through the course of the project and SMRU have continued throughout to respond informally to any approach for information from Government and their advisors. As part of this advice service SMRU were able to allocate staff time to three major tasks that resulted from the implementation of the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010;
- Ongoing annual requirement to assess licence applications under Part 6 of the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010.
- An analysis of seal haul-out distributions and numbers to define designated sites for protection from disturbance.
- Annual provision of updated PBR calculations for Scottish seal populations by seal management region.

In addition to these major tasks, provision of informal advice when required and attendance at meetings with Marine Scotland and their statutory advisors SMRU have provide formal advice notes on a wide range of marine mammal issues as detailed below.

2 List of Advice Requests

1. Request for advice about the displacement of marine mammals around operational offshore windfarms.
2. Request for advice on the populations of cetaceans that might potentially be involved in significant interactions with marine renewable energy developments in Scottish marine waters.
3. Harbour seal (*Phoca vitulina*) abundance within the Firth of Tay and Eden Estuary Special Area of Conservation: recent trends and extrapolation to extinction.
4. Whale entanglement in wave power devices.
5. A note on current level of understanding of the scale and causes of the unusual “corkscrew” injuries to grey and harbour seals in Scotland – (a) Identifying the mechanisms involved - And in particular whether it can be attributed to dynamic positioning systems or ducted propellers (b) Assessing the level of mortality and implications for local seal populations (c) Possible mitigation measures.
6. Comparative seal management across Europe. Do they practice shooting or non-lethal measures? For the nations that allow shooting what statistics exist, what levels of shooting are allowed in each case (as % of the population if possible)?
7. Request for advice from Scottish Natural Heritage concerning the level of connectivity between seals in the vicinity of the Ardersier haul-out site and the Dornoch Firth SAC.
8. Method used to identify key seal haul-out sites in Scotland for designation under the Marine (Scotland) Act Section 117.
9. Comments on acoustic trigger levels for the EPS licensing process.
10. Comments on the proposed corkscrew seal mitigation programme from Port of Ardersier Ltd and on the responses from MS-LOT and SNH.
11. Request for advice on the applicability of PBR as a method for managing interactions between seals and tidal turbine.
12. PBR update for seals around the coast of Scotland.

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/marine/Licensing/SealLicensing>

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13. Comments on all seal licence applications to Marine Scotland.

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