

MINUTE

Cross-Party Group on Animal Welfare

Friday 26th April 2024 @ 2pm via MS Teams

Present

MSPs

[CHAIR] Christine Grahame MSP (SNP)
Colin Smyth MSP (Scottish Labour)
Emma Harper MSP (SNP)
Maggie Chapman MSP (Scottish Green Party)

Invited guests

Dan Jarvis – British Divers Marine Life Rescue

Non-MSP Group Members

Gareth Hateley – British Veterinary Association
Caroline Robinson – SRUC
Danielle Knight – The Kennel Club
Dr Elspeth Stirling – Scottish Badgers
Edna Elliot-McColl
Georgie Hancock – The Humane League
Graeme Corbett – Animal Concern
Helene Mauchlen – British Horse Society
Jake Swindells – Countryside Alliance
Jessica Terry – World Animal Protection
Richard Ackers – Justice for Reggie
Kirsty Jenkins – OneKind
Tricia Colville – British Small Animal Veterinary Association
Molly Vasantha
Libby Anderson
Karen Coe
Lynda Holton (Secretary)

Agenda item 1 – Apologies

Mark Ruskell MSP (Scottish Green Party)
Morgan Brobyn – British Egg Industry Council
Sarah Johnston – Edinburgh Dog & Cat Home
Robert Mcgeachy – Food Standards Scotland
John Burns – World Horse Welfare

Agenda item 2 – Minutes of previous meeting

Minutes of previous meeting agreed by Maggie Chapman MSP and Colin Smyth MSP.

Agenda item 3 – Change of Secretary

Change of Secretary agreed from Karen Coe to Lynda Holton.

Agenda item 4 – Presentation and talk: ‘Seal disturbance as a growing problem: issues and solutions’ by Dan Jarvis, Director of Welfare & Conservation, British Divers Marine Life Rescue

Key points raised during presentation:

- Issues include disturbance by air (drones and aircraft); sea (powered vessels and watersports including paddle sports); and land (proximity of people on land, noise and dogs e.g. dogs running into colonies). The problem is largely around lone seal pups e.g. anti-social behaviour such as pups being picked up by humans (‘selfie’ culture) or attacked by dogs. Some haulout sites in UK disturbed every 14 minutes.
- Impacts include disturbed rest (as seals need time on land), energetic loss, injury, maternal separation, miscarriage and even death.
- Solutions include in-situ methods (such as signs, leaflets, rangers, fencing); ex-situ (media releases, social media, public talks, code of conduct); policy and law (site protection, seal protection, enforcement). Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 and Protection of Seals Order 2014 already exists for seals in Scotland but enforcement slow/limited. Video evidence is helpful but enforcement must be robust. Recommend: remote monitoring on all commercial fishing vessels and replicate efforts to add to Schedule 5 of Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (England).

Agenda item 4 – Q&A

- Gareth Hateley: comment re looking for markers for when seals may need to be uplifted.
- Maggie Chapman MSP: has there been any analysis of primary drivers of redistribution? A: combination of factors including food and weather. Storms have been much worse in last 10 years and mass casualties more extreme (e.g. in one storm 70-75% of pups were lost overnight; in another at a site near Edinburgh in 2021 850 pups were lost).
- Paul Reynolds: how to join the Seal Alliance? A: go to website, email Chair. Paul also mentioned UK petition to ban ring-style frisbees.
- Libby Anderson: should the list of haulout sites be limited? A: can go hand in hand with site and species protection. Good idea to revisit list.
- Jake Swindells: q re accidental disturbances. A: 100m radius applies to seals (same as other species to keep it clear). If animals approach you it’s not a disturbance. Hardest group to engage with are visitors from outside who launch boats etc.

- Christine Grahame MSP: what work is done to educate children re seal disturbance? A: volunteers have done school talks but limited in terms of volunteer availability.
- Colin Smyth MSP: q re remote electronic monitoring (REM).
- Elspeth Stirling: q re definition of disturbance.
- Edna Elliot-McColl: q re frisbee petition.
- Emma Harper MSP: q re REM. Not in proposed statutory instrument re catching unintended species.

Agenda item 5 – MSP Update

Colin Smyth MSP: Wildlife Management and Muirburn Bill now passed. Agriculture Bill Stage 2 – Colin proposing amendment re including animal welfare as an objective.

Maggie Chapman MSP: XL Bully issue ongoing. Been in touch with SSPCA Aberdeenshire re links between livestock farming and climate.

Emma Harper MSP: Dealing with local cases. Re livestock attacks – questions to FM and Minister Jim Fairlie. Has requested meeting with Cabinet Secretary.

Christine Grahame MSP: opposed XL Bully legislation due to concerns re definition; deed not breed best approach. Welfare of Dogs Bill Stage 1 debate expected 7th May. Registration scheme not supported by Scottish Government so will concede that part. However, still pursuing national microchipping database for dogs. Ban on glue traps in Wildlife Management and Muirburn Bill – Scottish Government left door open to enable exceptions in certain circumstances so not a complete ban.

Agenda item 6 – AOB

Libby Anderson: UK Centre for Animal Law (A-LAW) online debate on 30th April about pet theft.

Helene Mauchlen: equine exhibition taking place in Parliament next week which will raise prospect of database for horses.

Gareth Hateley: shortage of people available to type animals.

Agenda item 7 – Next meeting

Date of next meeting agreed for early September (post-summer recess). Chair suggested trying it as an in-person meeting in Parliament. Agreed to try it as a hybrid meeting (part in-person, part online).

Possible topics for future presentations discussed. Secretary advised that two requests had been made to make presentations as follows:

- Low-Welfare Animal Activities Abroad Bill – World Animal Protection
- On-farm poisoning from lead – Food Standards Scotland

No objections to either.