

# marine scotland

## USA/011/14: Investigations into the interactions between harbour seals and vessels in the Inner Moray Firth

**Date/Time/Venue:** 8 January 2015  
11.00 AM  
Meeting rooms 2E-70, Victoria Quay, Edinburgh

### Attendees:

Marine Scotland	Ian Walker (Chair) [REDACTED]
MSLOT	Tim Roberts
Marine Scotland Science	Finlay Bennet
Scottish Government (EAU)	Amanda Chisholm
Scottish Natural Heritage	John Baxter
Sea Mammal Research Unit	Dave Thompson Joe Onoufriou Phil Irving
University of Aberdeen	Paul Thompson ( via TC)

**Apologies:** Val Ferguson, Ports and Harbours Branch (SG)

### 1. Welcome and introductions

IW welcomed attendees to the meeting and provided a brief overview of the day.

### 2. Notes and actions from last meeting

The note of the previous meeting was agreed with no amendments. The majority of the actions set at the previous meeting (25 September 2014) were completed or taken under the agenda.

### 3. Presentation from Dave Thompson - Update on preliminary results from winter tagging of grey seal pups at Isle of May

DT presented the preliminary results from this study.

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The most important aspect of the results was that SMRU staff video-recorded an adult grey seal male predating on live grey seal pups and further examples were subsequently recorded.

Post mortem examination of carcasses by staff from SMASS and RSPB showed the majority of these cases had spiral lacerations which scored very high on the "corkscrew scale". The adult grey seal male was caught and tagged and he should continue to transmit data until end of March 2015.

In the light of this, SMRU and Andrew Brownlow (SRUC) are revisiting previous Spiral Seal Lacerations (SSL) cases to establish if these were also the result of grey seal predation or other causes.

A paper published in Germany (Nov 2014) – *Grey seal predation on harbour seals on the island of Helgoland, Germany* indicates similar predation behaviour.



Helgoland Germany -  
grey on harbour seal.

A review of latest information suggests there could be at least 5 individuals around Scotland manifesting this behaviour. The tagged grey seal male has moved to German shores.

DT considers that the evidence they have so far is enough to identify grey seal predation as one of the causes of SSL.

**Action. DT to submit presentation to Marine Scotland (MS) for circulation and submit a report of the latest research to MS by 16 January 2015.**

**All to treat this matter as confidential until the report will be published externally.**

#### **4. Forward look for current project:**

IW opened up a discussion of the research results and particularly what implications were for this project and the wider seal research.

#### **A. Moray Firth**

**Action. DT and PT to draft a revised plan for deployment of tags in the wider Moray Firth.** The exact locations are still to be decided but should explore the connectivity between Dornoch SAC and haul-out sites. Group agreed 40 of 52 tags should be used for this purpose.

#### **B. Wider Issues**

**Action. DT to develop proposals for action more widely:**

1. DNA sampling – review existing samples and consider if this avenue is worth pursuing
2. Review existing seal survey to consider scope for inter-species predation
3. Consider review of seal surveys to capture info on predation impacts

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4. Consider quick visual check of major grey seal haul-out sites for possible evidence of predation.

**Action. IW to consider absorption of this project steering group into wider MMSS group.**

## **5. Terms of Reference – comments from group members**

It was agreed this issue is not a priority as this project will be merged into MMSS. AC suggested introducing the issue of confidentiality in the ToR.

## **6. AOB**

**Action. The Topic Sheet will be removed from Marine Scotland webpage until further notice.**

**Action. IW will set up an early meeting with SNCB's, MMO and NGO's.**

