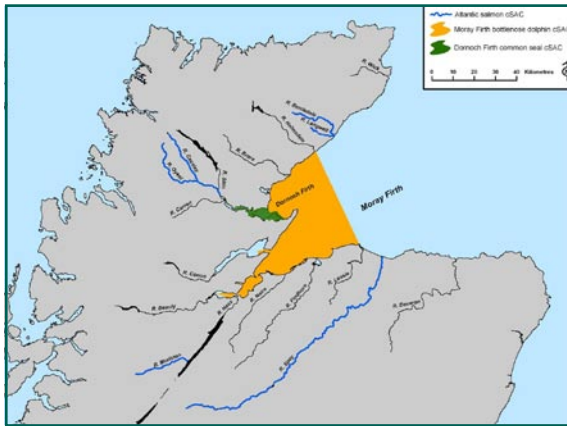




# The Moray Firth Seal Management Plan



requirements for seal and salmon conservation, and the economics of salmon fishing and tourism.

## The Plan

The Moray Firth Seal Management Plan is the first attempt to address the whole issue of the impact of seal predation on salmon fisheries in a co-ordinated way. It is intended as a pilot scheme which could eventually be applied in the long-term and in other areas.

## Background

The Moray Firth contains protected populations of harbour (or common) seals, bottlenose dolphins and salmon. Interactions between protected species present us with a conservation dilemma. In addition, these species support the economically important activities of marine wildlife tourism and fishing. Historically, this region has seen a great deal of conflict about how to manage seals in order to protect salmon fisheries.



Harbour Seal mother and pup

In the Moray Firth the numbers of both salmon returning to rivers during the spring and harbour seals have declined in recent years. Declining numbers of seals and salmon in Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) designated for both species has led to a need to develop a coordinated management approach. The Moray Firth Seal Management Plan was devised in order to find a compromise between the competing legal

The Plan has been developed by the District Salmon Fishery Boards including local salmon netting stations, in consultation with the Scottish Government, the Sea Mammal Research Unit, the University of Aberdeen, Fisheries Research Services, the Atlantic Salmon Trust and Scottish Natural Heritage. It has received broad support from the Scottish Seals Forum, the Moray Firth Partnership and the Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.



The **aims** of the Plan are to:

- Manage seal and salmon fishery conflicts within the Moray Firth to have minimal impact on wildlife and tourism,
- Restore and maintain the ‘favourable conservation status’ of harbour seals and salmon in their SACs,
- Reduce the impact of shooting on the harbour seal population, through licensing and targeting key areas where there may be conflicts,
- Reduce the impact of seal predation, especially on spring salmon stocks,
- Develop non-lethal methods, such as seal scarers, to reduce the number of seal-salmon interactions, particularly within rivers,
- Monitor and research the status of seal populations, salmon stocks and interactions between them.

The Plan was put in place in April 2005.



The Dornoch Firth and Morrich More SAC

Licensed seal shooting is only carried out in cases when there is no alternative way of removing seals from rivers. This has led to many fewer seals being shot than in the past. The numbers being removed in this way are now considered to be within biologically safe limits, calculated in relation to the overall size of the Moray Firth seal population. Research is also demonstrating that some seals tend to specialise in feeding in salmon rivers.



Grey seal with salmon

The Plan is also leading to a greater understanding of seal biology amongst fisheries managers and it is raising awareness of the competing needs of seals, salmon and their importance to the local economy of the Moray Firth.

### Further Information

[www.SpeyFisheryBoard.com](http://www.SpeyFisheryBoard.com)

[www.scotland.gov.uk/topics/environment/wildlife-habitats/mfplan](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/topics/environment/wildlife-habitats/mfplan)

SMRU leaflet “Marine mammals and wild salmon”