

Recovery and reporting of seals to the Scottish strandings scheme



Photograph by A. Coram SMRU © Crown Copyright

Background

The University of Glasgow currently holds a contract to record and investigate seal strandings in Scotland. This work is funded by the Scottish Government and is designed to support the new seal licensing system.

Recovery

You should take all reasonable steps to recover the carcasses of seals killed under licence, or to alleviate suffering. Much detailed information can be gained from a seal carcass, including positive species identification, age, sex, diet, etc. Even a carcass which has been in the water for several days should be retrieved wherever possible.

When you have a carcass to be recovered:

1. Ensure that you are not putting yourself in danger
2. Wear suitable heavy-duty gloves.
3. Move the seal carcass above the high

water mark, away from water to a discreet location to avoid carcass being washed away and any risk to public health.

4. If necessary cover carcass
5. Make careful note of its exact location.
6. After handling, wash and disinfect yourself thoroughly.

Reporting

You should report details of any seal carcass, including OS grid reference, site details, your telephone number and address, to the **Scottish Marine Animal Strandings Programme**

Tel: 07979 245893

Email: reports@strandings.org

Any other seal carcasses discovered can also be reported.

It is important that the report is made by someone who has actually seen the seal carcass so that the best possible description of the condition, size etc. of the animal is available. The use of digital photographs can be of great benefit in allowing assessment of the freshness of the carcass. Many people now have mobile phones with cameras and, if possible, pictures should be sent to the Stranding's Co-ordinator. This along with accurate location data and an estimate of the size of the carcass is very valuable. Local knowledge of suitable access for collection is also useful.

It is possible that some seal carcasses which are too badly decomposed or too difficult to recover may not be collected.

Any other seal or marine mammal carcasses discovered should also be reported via this route.

Collection

Seals can be very heavy with adult grey male seals reaching over 200 Kg. Common seals are smaller and the adult male will rarely reach 100 Kg. This means that mechanical assistance is generally required for recovering a seal carcass. A four wheel drive with a winch in the

loading platform is used to collect seals for examination.

Examination

Seal carcasses that have been collected are taken to the laboratory at the Scottish Marine Animal Stranding Scheme where they are subject to an examination in order to establish cause of death and to collect samples in order to increase knowledge of these animals. For example, food remains in the seals stomach can be used to find out what it was eating. The inner ear bones of fish are very hard and remain in the stomach long after the fish tissue and skeleton have been digested. These can be used to identify both species and provide an estimate of the size of the fish eaten. Information on the reproductive status of the seal can also be gathered and examination of teeth can provide age estimates.

If you have problems disposing of any unwanted seal carcasses you should seek advice from the local office of the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA).

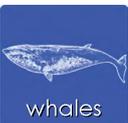
For further information please visit the following websites:

Marine Scotland
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/marine-licensing-seals-killed-to-alleviate-suffering/>

Scottish Marine Animal Strandings Programme www.strandings.org

SEPA www.sepa.org.uk

Scottish Marine Animal Stranding Hotline



whales



dolphins



seals



turtles



basking sharks

If you find a
dead, stranded marine animal,
please call

07979 245893

or email
reports@strandings.org

Rescue for **LIVE** strandings can be called 24 hours a day through
Scottish SPCA Animal Helpline (03000 999 999)
or **British Divers Marine Life Rescue (01825 765546)**.

- 1 What is it? (What type/species of animal? If you are not sure, take pictures on your phone or camera)
- 2 Where is it? (As precise a location as you can give, how far to the nearest road access and is it above the high tide mark?)
- 3 What size is it? (Approximate length, can it be moved or secured against removal by the tide?)
- 4 How fresh is it? (Is it in a good state or a smelly heap of bones? Are parts missing?)

WARNING: Marine animals are wild animals. They may carry diseases which are transferable to humans. Do not put yourself at risk of injury. Do not attempt to move heavy animals without adequate assistance. Always wash hands thoroughly after any contact.

The Scottish Marine Animal Stranding Scheme collates, investigates and reports information on stranded marine animals for Scotland. It is managed by the University of Glasgow in collaboration with the following organisations:

