

SEAL HAUL OUT SITES



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Background

From 30 September 2014, under The Protection of Seals (Designation of Seal haul-Out Sites) (Scotland) Order 2014, it is an offence to harass seals at any of the 194 designated seal haul-out sites around Scotland.

What is a haul-out site?

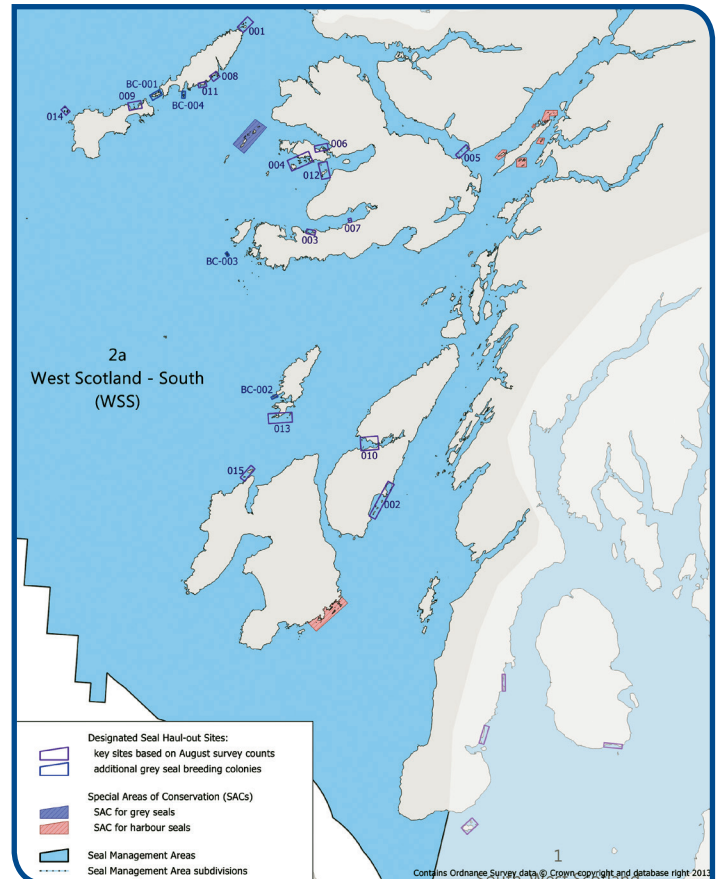
A haul-out site is a location on land where seals come ashore to rest, to moult, to breed and have pups. Seals that are hauled out on land may be sensitive to too close an approach by humans from the land, sea or air and caution is required in such circumstances. However, seals will generally choose haul-out sites that are subject to minimal disturbance by humans.

Site and locations

The 194 designated sites are fairly small:

- 107 on isolated and uninhabited islands
- 70 on isolated and uninhabited stretches of coastline
- 17 are closer to some form of human habitation

These, however, tend to be at the foot of cliffs or on offshore rocks or sandbanks and relatively isolated.



Of the 194 sites:

- 149 are haul-out sites:
 - 62 used mainly by common (or harbour) seals (*Phoca vitulina*)
 - 20 used mainly by grey seals (*Halichoerus grypus*)
 - 67 are shared by both these species.
- 45 additional sites are grey seal breeding colonies, used by this species specifically during their pupping season. All of these sites will be designated for protection all year round.

How were the sites decided?

In 2011, Marine Scotland consulted stakeholders' about an initial list of 146 haul-out sites. This list was subsequently revised and expanded to produce a final list of 194 haul-out sites for designation by Scottish Ministers.



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The Sea Mammal Research Unit (SMRU) on behalf of the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) developed a standardised method to identify key seal haul-out sites in Scotland. The site selection process nominated those haul-out sites that offered an optimum balance between maximising protection for the largest number of seals while minimising possible impacts on other sustainable activities around the coast. Greater attention was given to areas which have been affected by recent declines in numbers.

Review of designated haul-out sites

The initial list of designated seal haul-out sites is open for review by Scottish Ministers. This allows for the designated sites to reflect changes in seal haul-out patterns over time by the addition of sites newly adopted by seals, if they meet the

criteria, or by the removal of existing sites that seals have abandoned and which no longer meet the criteria.

What constitutes harassment?

Marine Scotland in collaboration with SMRU, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and Marine Scotland Science has developed guidance on what might constitute harassment. The guidance is advisory only and is not binding on the criminal courts:

“Harassment would involve an activity that pesters, torments, troubles or attacks a seal on a designated haul-out site”

In particular, it would include any action that causes a significant proportion of seals on a haul-out site to leave that site either more than once or repeatedly or, in the worst cases, to abandon it permanently.



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