



Department
for Environment,
Food & Rural Affairs

Call for Evidence

Seal disturbance and the implications of possible
additional regulation in England

October 2026

We are responsible for improving and protecting the environment. We aim to grow a green economy and sustain thriving rural communities. We also support our world-leading food, farming and fishing industries.

Defra is a ministerial department, supported by 34 agencies and public bodies.



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Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at MarineSpeciesConservation@defra.gov.uk.

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Foreword

Seals are a natural part of healthy marine ecosystems and can be found around much of the English coastline.

People may encounter seals while undertaking a range of activities on land, in freshwater, and at sea, including recreation, tourism, and other coastal and marine activities. Disturbing seals may disrupt behaviours such as resting, moulting, breeding or caring for pups (juvenile seals).

The [Marine and Coastal Wildlife Code](#) states that wildlife can be disturbed by:

- approaching, moving or touching an animal
- crowding, circling, separating or chasing
- feeding them
- making noise
- damaging or changing habitats

The government is seeking evidence to better understand the nature and impacts of disturbance to seals, the effectiveness of existing protections, and the implications of potential future changes to legislation. This will inform policy development on this topic.

Executive summary

We are seeking evidence on seal disturbance to inform decision-making. This includes questions on intentional or reckless disturbance to gather information on the implications of any potential additional regulation in this area, including any environmental, social and economic impacts.

Please provide full references for the source material in the response to your questions – we welcome a diversity of types of information.

Using and sharing your information

How we use your personal data is set out in the consultation and call for evidence exercise privacy notice which can be found here

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/defras-consultations-and-call-for-evidence-exercises-privacy-notice>.

Other information

This consultation is being conducted in line with the Cabinet Office “Consultation Principles” and be found at: [Microsoft Word - Consultation Principles \(1\).docx \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

If you have any comments or complaints about the call for evidence process, please address them to consultation.coordinator@defra.gov.uk.

How to respond

To submit your call for evidence response please complete the call for evidence questionnaire provided through Smart Survey (Smart Survey is an online consultation tool).

If you cannot respond online, you may submit your response by email to MarineSpeciesConservation@defra.gov.uk (please include "Call for Evidence" in the subject line).

The call for evidence opens at 10:00 19/10/2026 and closes at 23:59 on 16/11/2026. Any responses received after this date will not be analysed.

Call for Evidence Questions

About you

These questions allow us to understand who is responding to this call for evidence and carry out data analysis. Please note that answers to some questions are required – in those cases, this will be clearly stated. If you do not answer all questions marked 'required' your responses to this call for evidence will not be considered.

Question 1: Would you like your response to this call for evidence to be confidential?

(Required)

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If you answered 'Yes' please give your reason(s)

Details

Question 2: If you answered 'no' to Question 1, provide your full name

If you are representing an organisation or group, you will be asked its name later (see Question 4)

(Required)

Question 3: Provide your email address or, alternatively, your full postal address

If you do not have an email address, please provide a full postal address including postcode

(Required)

Question 4: In what capacity are you completing this call for evidence?

(Required)

- ☐ Academic
- ☐ Consultant
- ☐ Government or public body
- ☐ Industry
- ☐ Member of the public
- ☐ Non-governmental organisation
- ☐ Other

If other, please specify.

Please name your organisation, if relevant. Representative groups are asked to give a summary of the people and organisations they represent and where relevant, anyone else they have consulted in formulating their responses.

Question 5: Where are you, or the organisation you are representing, located?

(Required)

- ☐ England
- ☐ Other

If other, please specify.

Section A: Scale of seal disturbance in England

Question 6: Have you observed or are you aware of incidents of seal disturbance in England?

(Required)

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

If yes, please explain, including a brief description of the event and the time of year, and any evidence on location, frequency and apparent impact of the disturbance, for example on animal welfare. Please summarise where information relates to repeated incidents.

Question 7: The Marine and Coastal Wildlife Code identifies the following activities and behaviours as having the potential to disturb seals:

- Approaching, touching, crowding, circling, chasing or feeding seals
- Dog walking where dogs are not kept under effective control
- Kayaking, canoeing and paddleboarding
- Making noise in the vicinity of seals
- Motorboats and other powered vessels, including personal watercraft
- Surfing, including kitesurfing, windsurfing and foil surfing
- Swimming, diving and snorkelling
- Wildlife watching and photography at close range

Are there any other activities or behaviours that you believe can cause disturbance to seals that are not included in the list above?

(Required)

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

If yes, please describe the activity or behaviour and provide any evidence, examples or references supporting its inclusion.

Section B: Adequacy of existing protections in England

Question 8: Do current legislative and non-legislative measures (for example guidance/codes of conduct) provide adequate protection against seal disturbance in England?

(Required)

A list of legislative measures for seals can be found here: [Seals - GOV.UK.](#)

A non-legislative example would be the Marine and Coastal Wildlife Code.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

Please provide details and any supporting evidence.

Question 9: Do you have any suggestions of additional non-legislative or local approaches that could be effective in addressing seal disturbance?

(Required)

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

If yes, please provide details and any supporting evidence.

Question 10: Are you aware of successful examples that address seal disturbance, including those from other countries?

(Required)

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

If yes, please provide details and any supporting evidence.

Section C: Impacts of possible additional regulation in England

Question 11: Should any additional protections for seals from intentional or reckless disturbance apply wherever seals are present in England, or only at specific locations, such as places of shelter?

(Required)

- ☐ Wherever seals are present in England
- ☐ Specific locations
- ☐ Not sure

Please provide details and any supporting evidence.

Question 12: What socio-economic impact could arise from making the intentional or reckless disturbance of seals an offence?

(Required)

- ☐ Significant positive impact
- ☐ Some positive impact
- ☐ No significant impact
- ☐ Some negative impact
- ☐ Significant negative impact
- ☐ Mixed impacts
- ☐ Not sure

Please provide details and any supporting evidence.

Question 13: What environmental impact could arise from making the intentional or reckless disturbance of seals an offence?

(Required)

- ☐ Significant positive impact
- ☐ Some positive impact
- ☐ No significant impact
- ☐ Some negative impact
- ☐ Significant negative impact
- ☐ Mixed impacts
- ☐ Not sure

Please provide details and any supporting evidence.

Question 14: Are there any activities that should be exempt, or instances of legitimate disturbance that should be licensable, if the intentional or reckless disturbance of seals became an offence?

(Required)

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

If yes, please describe what exemptions or licensing provisions may be needed and provide any supporting evidence.

Section D: Further evidence

Question 15: Do you have any further evidence relevant to seal disturbance in England that has not been covered by previous questions?

(Required)

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

If yes, please provide details and any supporting evidence.

Next steps

Thank you for taking your time to participate in this online survey.

After the close of this call for evidence, Defra will publish a summary of the responses received. The findings from the call for evidence will inform any future decisions related to policy on seal disturbance.