**Seal Pup Release Protocols**

for

**Caithness Seal Rehab & Release**

Returning a seal pup back to the wild not only depends on when the seal pup is considered fit and healthy for release, it also depends on the weather, season and even the time of day.

Extreme weather conditions may make it difficult for the seal pups to re-adjust to their natural environment.

Seal pups should be released early in the day and when the sea state is calm, allowing plenty of daylight for them to get used to their surroundings. The weather forecast is checked several days in advance of a planned release, as well as several days after their release to make sure they have time to adapt before any bad weather is expected.

Where possible we release the seal pups in the bay local to us and just down the road from the hospital. We try to release them as quickly as possible. But this will depend on how injured, ill, or how underweight they were when they were initially brought into the hospital. The best spots to forage for food and places to shelter from bad weather or hide from predators is plentiful down in our bay.

Our release site is carefully chosen to give the best chance of survival and for the pups to integrate into the seal colonies we already have down in the bay.

We also must consider the dangers posed by humans and keep this in mind when pups are released.

Common seals are born in spring/summer and grey seal pups are born in autumn/winter. The seal pups are released at an appropriate time of year which coincides with when they would have been in the area naturally. Common and Grey seal pups are released according to their weight, health and whether they are eating fish independently in the pool. No seal is released if they do not meet these three criteria. Common seal pups are released at 40+kg and Grey seal pups are released at 35+kg.

Our seals are tagged with small plastic tags on their rear flipper. This makes for easy Identification should the seal pup haul out anywhere. Should we find a seal pup that is tagged, and it is injured or is not coping, a decision will be made as to whether it needs to be uplifted and examined by a vet and brought back into the hospital. This decision will be made with the seal pups’ welfare being the most important consideration.