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▶ HOME

▶ LETTERS

▶ NEWS

▶ ISSUES

▶ CLASSIFIEDS

▶ LINKS

▶ CONTACT US



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"Hop Off The PCB Bandwagon, Friends"

08/20/03

IT'S HEADED RIGHT FOR US!!

Glass Houses

It's really great when your primary competitor takes a direct hit to the boiler room. And it's even better when somebody else is firing the shot. Such was the feeling of wild-salmon fishermen when the Washington D.C.-based Environmental Working Group fired a broadside at the farmed salmon industry with their PR cannons packed full of PCBs and other alarmist rhetoric.

"Hooray for the greens!" we cried. "Take that, you pellet-pushing, feedlot-farming, multinational, flesh-dyeing dogs!" And we celebrated the group's recommendation to eat wild fish, not farmed.

The story went forth worldwide, carried by the New York Times, Time magazine and every major news network. Small matter that the study's farmed-fish sample size was only 10 fish and their wild salmon data came from just 4 salmon — 2 of which were plankton-feeding sockeye and one a plankton-feeding chum. The only truly comparative sample was a single wild chinook.

"Sample size, shmample size," the EWG responded when challenged by salmon farmers and the National Fisheries Institute. "Show us your own data to refute our conclusions," they sneered.

Unfortunately there is more data available, but it's not more data about PCB levels in farmed salmon. It's more data about PCB levels in wild chinook and coho salmon gathered by scientists from the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife between 1992 and 1995.

The data published by researcher Sandra O'Neill in the "Puget Sound Research '98 Proceedings" of Puget Sound Water Quality Action Team, was drawn from samples of 335 adult chinook and coho. The average PCB level from all samples was 41.9 parts per billion — higher than all but one of the farmed fish sampled and pilloried by the EWG. One subset of the 178 wild chinook sampled by WDF&W included 34 wild king salmon taken from Puget Sound's marine waters (outside of rivers). The average PCB level for those king salmon was 74.2 ppb — greater than any of the farmed fish tested in the EWG's highly publicized environmental rant. And it's more than seven times the level the environmental group reported for Chilean farmed salmon.

Thankfully all levels reported by both studies for wild and farmed salmon are way below the FDA limit for safe human consumption. But it's time to hop off the PCB bandwagon, friends. It's headed right for us.

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ARTICLE SEARCH:

for
in

▶ UPCOMING EVENTS:

- ▶ 2004 American Heartland Aquaculture Conference (01/09/04)
- ▶ 10th Annual Recirculating Aquaculture Systems Short Course (07/26/04)

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NEW DOCUMENTS:

- ▶ NMFS 2002 Risk Assessment (PDF)
- ▶ WAS testimony to Ocean Commission (MS-Word)