Environmental alarmism has cost humanity a lot in hindered economic development and scientific exploration (GM foods ban in Europe). Most disturbing is the damage it caused in terms of actual human health and life, especially as it affects children. Notable here is Rachel Carson’s (the mother of modern environmentalism) hysteria over DDT leading to the ban of this successful anti-malarial chemical. That ban has led to an estimated 50 million deaths of mainly children (See Ronald Bailey’s  history of this DDT ban and the distorted claims of damage it supposedly caused). As Bailey suggested, instead of being lauded for her stand she should have been prosecuted for mass murder.

Here is another example of environmental alarmism causing human damage and again mostly to children.

# Suzuki's fish story



Getty Images

"Don't buy farmed salmon anywhere. Phone your local hospitals and find out if farmed salmon is served to patients," says a brochure from the David Suzuki Foundation.

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Vivian Krause, Financial Post · Mar. 15, 2011 | **Last Updated: Mar. 15, 2011 12:19 PM ET**

Canada has the largest coastline in the world and we're right next door to the world's largest seafood market: the United States. If there's one industry that Canada should be developing, it's aquaculture. Northern B.C. and Nova Scotia, the places where fish farming could provide hundreds of jobs, are some of the poorest parts of Canada.

Aquaculture avoids the worst risks of commercial fishing, such as overfishing and by-catch. Yet, ironically, the biggest obstacle facing the aquaculture industry is opposition from environmentalists. In British Columbia, a "war on fish farmers" has been declared. More than 20,000 people signed a petition to close salmon farms.

"Don't buy farmed salmon anywhere. Phone your local hospitals and find out if farmed salmon is served to patients," says a brochure from the David Suzuki Foundation.

A few years ago, Global Assessment of Organic Contaminants in Farmed Salmon, a study by Ronald Hites et al., triggered a worldwide scare about contaminants in farmed salmon. The Hites study found that levels of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) were eight-fold higher in farmed Atlantic salmon than in Pacific salmon. If the eight-fold difference had been between 0.5 parts per million (ppm) and 4.0 ppm, the findings would have been consequential to human health. However, the eight-fold difference was between 0.0366 ppm and 0.0048 ppm.

Since the tolerable level for PCBs in fish is 2.0 ppm, the eight-fold difference is inconsequential. Nonetheless, in a newswire that dismayed scientists, the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) reported Farmed Salmon More Toxic Than Wild. Following suit, the media reported the Hites study with alarming headlines worldwide.

The same day that the Hites study was published, the Alaskan governor issued a press release. He said, "It is important to note that this study is not telling people not to eat fish. It is telling them to eat more wild Alaskan salmon."

David Carpenter, a co-author of the Hites study, told the press, "We hope it does not turn people away from fish, we hope it turns people away from farmed salmon." Mr. Carpenter also told the media that "women should avoid eating farmed salmon at all, from the day they are born through menopause," and that "one should avoid farmed salmon like the plague. Our results indicate elevated cancer risk from one meal (of farmed salmon) or even less per month."

The problem is, Mr. Carpenter's claims are way out of line with the actual findings of the Hites study. Furthermore, Agriculture Canada, the U.S. Institute of Medicine and the U.K. authorities advise eating salmon -farmed or wild -on a weekly basis.

"There are no consistent differences between wild and farmed fish both in terms of safety and nutritional contribution," says the European Food Safety Authority.

The Hites study was published in the prestigious journal Science, the flagship of the AAAS. At the time, the editor-inchief of Science was Donald Kennedy, a former president of Stanford University, and a trustee of the David and Lucile Packard Foundation. The current editor-in-chief of Science, Bruce Alberts, is a trustee of the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation.

Since 2000, Packard and Moore have granted more than US$130-million to B.C. organizations, none of them favourable to salmon farming. Of that, at least, US$12-million went to the members of the Coastal Alliance for Aquaculture Reform which runs a demarketing campaign called Farmed and Dangerous. This campaign against farmed salmon is based on research about PCBs and sea lice, conveniently published in the journal Science.

Packard has paid a staggering US$83-million since 2000 for various projects to sway market share towards wild fish and away from the competition: imported, farmed fish. The Marine Sciences program of the AAAS is funded by Packard.

The Hites study and its publicity was paid for with US$5.5-million from the Pew Charitable Trusts; US$2.5-million was granted to the State University of New York and US$2.5-million to the Tides Center, part of the Tides Foundation. Tides has refused to say how that money was spent. Pew also granted US$140,000 to Mr. Carpenter and US$300,000 to Daniel Pauly at the University of British Columbia. For a study of its kind, a US$5.5-million budget was unusual. The US$440,000 for publicity was highly unusual.

As per Pew's specifications, the Hites study compared farmed Atlantic salmon and wild Pacific salmon. Because wild Atlantic salmon and farmed Pacific salmon were excluded, comparisons among the same species of salmon were avoided. In essence, the study compared apples to oranges. Had the Hites study compared wild versus farmed Atlantic salmon, or wild vs. farmed Pacific king ("chinook") salmon, it would likely have found higher levels of contaminants in the wild fish, a conclusion precisely the opposite of what was spread around the world in scary headlines.

In the London Times, Magnus Linklater called the Hites study "a sorry saga of flawed science, selective research and hidden commercial bias." Sandy Szwarc wrote in a newsletter of the Competitive Enterprise Institute, "An ulterior motive may be at work.. Facing competition from aquaculture, the wild salmon industries of California, British Columbia, and Alaska have allied themselves with environmental groups to promote wild salmon as the healthier and environmentally friendly choice."

Facing stiff competition from farmed salmon, the value of Alaskan salmon collapsed over the 1990s from a peak of US$1.2-billion to only US$125-million. Since 2002, Alaskan salmon prices have tripled. This remarkable improvement was due in part to Alaska's US$50-million Salmon Revitalization program. However, much of that money went to 2,600 fishermen and 63 municipalities. That won't have done much to improve salmon prices.

After Alaskan salmon prices improved, the Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute reported, "The infusion of dollars wasn't the sole driver; we need to be honest here. It wasn't the only thing that changed market conditions. There was some bad press for farmed salmon and there was the health issue and people wanting more seafood in their diets. All these things kind of came together like the perfect storm."

On the day before the Hites study was actually published, press releases were issued by a trio of Packard-funded en-vironmental organizations, including SeaWeb, Environmental Defense and the David Suzuki Foundation. SeaWeb calls wild salmon "the white truffle of seafood" and has a long history of promoting Alaskan salmon. Environmental Defense provides recipe cards for Alaskan salmon. Since 2000, SeaWeb and Environmental Defense have been paid US$23-million and US$21-million, respectively, by the Packard foundation.

SeaWeb was also paid by the Moore Foundation to co-ordinate an "antifarming campaign," including "science messages" and "earned media." After questions were raised about this grant, it was quietly rewritten by the Moore Foundation.

Idaho University researchers found that after the Hites study, bad press about farmed salmon tripled for about two years. Ninety percent of the news items mentioned cancer risks and yet the actual research findings didn't indicate any such risks.

The Hites study was a follow-up to a study from the David Suzuki Foundation in 2002. Before it was published, David Suzuki sent a form letter to thousands of supporters. His letter began, "This may be one of the most unusual 'Thank you' letters you've ever received, but here goes. I want to say thank you for helping me to uncover the fact that B.C. farmed salmon is heavily contaminated with PCBs and other toxins."

The problem is, David Suzuki didn't uncover the "fact" that he said he did. His study only had eight fish. Mercury levels were actually higher in the wild salmon than in the farmed, but that's meaningless because such a small sample isn't representative of either farmed or wild salmon.

The Suzuki study came on the heels of market research by SeaWeb, conducted in the spring of 2001. A few months later, Pew made the first of several grants for the Hites study and on the very same day, Pew granted US$181,000 to the David Suzuki Foundation.

David Suzuki's research about contaminants in farmed salmon was funded by the Lazar Foundation, a pro-Alaskan foundation based in Portland, Oregon. Lazar also paid the David Suzuki Foundation US$12,500 "for legal action challenging the expansion of salmon feedlots in British Columbia. Lazar also funded market research by SeaWeb about farmed versus wild salmon.

SeaWeb's market research found that the most compelling reason why people might avoid a certain fish is fear of contaminants. Sadly, the least important factor was whether the species is overfished.

SeaWeb and Environmental Defense have been saying that the maximum number of safe meals of farmed salmon is half a meal per month for adults and older children and for younger children, zero meals. Who's going to feed their child half a meal because half is safe and half isn't?

"The avoidance of modest fish consumption due to confusion regarding risks and benefits could result in thousands of deaths every year due to cardiovascular disease, and the suboptimal neurodevelopment in young children," Harvard scientists warn.

At the University of British Columbia, scientists found that Vancouverborn infants of well-educated mothers are deficient in omega-3 fatty acids. The infants' eyesight was compromised, their brain development may have been affected. This situation is not helped by the fact that Canada's most trusted environmentalist has been giving pregnant women faulty advice to avoid farmed salmon. The truth is, farmed salmon is higher in omega-3 fatty acids than any other fish. The Packard foundation paid the David Suzuki Foundation US$762,600 for Pacific Salmon Forests, a project that produced a brochure titled, Why You Shouldn't Eat Farmed Salmon.

David Suzuki has been asked whether the bad press that his foundation has generated about salmon farming is part of a "demarketing" campaign to prop up demand for Alaskan salmon. He hasn't replied, but 20 press releases and negative articles about farmed salmon have been quietly removed from his foundation's website. Nevertheless, the campaign against farmed salmon rages on. In 2010, the Moore foundation paid the David Suzuki Foundation US$329,525 for "salmon market standards."

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