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## New scientific studies raise concern over toxicity of farmed fish feed

**January 4, 2001** - VANCOUVER, CANADA - Startling new scientific evidence from Canada and Britain suggests that potentially dangerous levels of toxic chemicals are contained in the feed given to farmed salmon in Canada and Scotland, the David Suzuki Foundation announced today.

The research shows that the contaminants, known as persistent organic pollutants, are especially dangerous for children, nursing mothers and pregnant women or women considering pregnancy. The studies were conducted in Canada by Dr. Michael Easton for the David Suzuki Foundation and in Britain by Dr. Miriam Jacobs in conjunction with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

"We are calling on the Canadian government to immediately heed these findings and to fund the next stage of research needed to determine the safety of farmed salmon and salmon feed for people who consume this fish regularly," said Jim Fulton, executive director of the David Suzuki Foundation.

"Our research, conducted by Dr. Easton, is a pilot study that examined a small sample size. But the results demonstrate reason for concern and the need for further study. We believe it is now the responsibility of the federal government to fund research that can shed more light on these findings," he added.

The research by Drs. Easton and Jacobs shows the farmed fish sampled contained much higher levels of pollutants, including 10 times more Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs), than wild fish. Their studies were conducted independently of each other.

"The results were very, very clear," Dr. Easton, a Vancouver-based geneticist and expert in ecotoxicology, told the British Broadcasting Corporation in a television documentary to be aired this Sunday (Jan. 7) in Britain.

"Farmed fish and the feed that they were fed appeared to have a much higher level of contamination with respect to PCBs, organochlorine pesticides and polybrominated diphenyl ethers than did wild fish. In fact, it was extremely noticeable," he said.

"It is a function of how the feed is made, of their concentrating of these different materials to produce high-protein diets for the fish and ultimately the contaminants apparently get concentrated as well," Dr. Easton said, adding that these pollutants affect the nervous system, the immune system and can cause cancer.

"They're a neural toxin, which causes learning disabilities (especially in children) but they are also an immuno toxic," he told the BBC. "They cause depression of the immune system that enables you to catch colds and flus and infections much more easily than normal, and they also aid the production of cancer."

Dr. Jacobs, a toxicologist in the School of Biological Sciences at the University of Surrey (U.K.), told the BBC: "I am concerned about the dietary intake of small children and infants. Their dietary intake will be far greater than for an adult based on body weight. An ongoing study in Holland has been monitoring for background levels of PCBs in very young children and up to school age, and it has been found that there is a greater risk of infection and a greater risk of impairment of cognitive development in those children that have higher intakes of PCBs."

While the contaminant levels discovered by Drs. Easton and Jacobs were below government-approved safety levels, both scientists said they are concerned for people who regularly eat farmed salmon, and also about how governments establish risk-assessment values for human consumption of chemicals and pollutants.

The BBC program Warning from the wild: The price of salmon especially raises questions about British Standards, which are far weaker than those of the World Health Organization (WHO) and other European countries which are following the newly established WHO standards. A spokesman for Britain's Food Standards Agency says they only recommend a person eat one portion of farmed salmon a week.

"Once again, we have so many questions raised by scientists about this industry," Mr. Fulton said. "What we want from the Canadian government is that they fund additional scientific investigation. We are a small research agency and we cannot afford to conduct the next stage of research which is estimated at approximately \$800,000."

Those funds could be found in the office of Canada's Aquaculture Commissioner whose office has an annual budget of over \$2 million, Mr. Fulton added.

"I presume that some of the work his office should be doing is this type of scientific research so I look forward to speaking to the Minister of Fisheries (Hon. Herb Dhaliwal) about the possibility of continuing Dr. Easton's work," he said.

For more information and to arrange interviews, please call Jean Kavanagh of the David Suzuki Foundation at 604-732-4228, ext. 229 or 604-251-5729.

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