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Debunking science: a burgeoning business

If there's one business that's booming today, it's debunking science.

The palaver over global warming data in the leadup to the Copenhagen climate change conference is but one example. Blood vessels on temples were spontaneously bursting on both sides of the debate after data from the **Climatic Research Unit at East Anglia University** was found to have strayed from sound scientific rigour on the road to self-serving political destinations. That's badly smudged the pages of the climate change choir's hymnbook.

Down at street level, meanwhile, citizens are not much impressed with scientists as propagandists.

A **Compas** poll done for the **Frontier Centre for Public Policy** found that a majority of Canadians surveyed wanted to delay signing a global warming treaty in Copenhagen. Reasons included concern over the economy and doubts about the integrity of the science.

Closer to home, **Vivian Krause** is likewise debunking what she sees as questionable science. Her target: sea lice. Specifically, the farmed salmon variety and its impact on wild salmon stocks.

She maintains that influential forces in the United States are bankrolling the "demarketing" of B.C. farmed salmon to promote the sale of "wild" Alaskan salmon. The sea lice yarn, she says, is an extremely effective demarketing campaign.

Cynics will write Krause off as another conspiracy kook. But she backs her thesis with more than empty rhetoric.

Krause is upfront about her previous salmon farming industry connections and says she's not against American money financing environmental groups to attack B.C. salmon farms. Krause just wants the extent of that financing to be reported and the science supporting the sea lice claims to be rooted in fact, not political fantasy.

According to her findings, there's a lot of fantasy involved in those claims.

Exhibit A in Krause's debunking case: research papers published by the

Centre for Mathematical Biology (CMB) at the **University of Alberta**, which claim that sea lice from salmon farms threaten wild salmon in B.C.'s Broughton Archipelago with extinction. Those papers, Krause says, raise more questions than answers.

"Senior scientists and experts," she writes, "have noted peculiarities and serious flaws in the CMB's research and its reporting of some of the findings: lack of adequate baseline data, 'cherry-picking' of data used in mathematical modelling, flawed assumptions, selective and inaccurate reporting and unsubstantiated claims."

She also points out that sea lice are found on many wild-fish species, but a method for tracing their origin has yet to be developed.

It's impossible, therefore, "to distinguish between sea lice that originate from farm fish and those that originate from wild fish."

That muddies the waters around CMB claims over which sea lice are affecting Broughton Archipelago pink salmon and how seriously they've been affected by the lice.

Krause, who worked in the salmon farming industry from 2002 to 2003 and again as an industry consultant in 2007, compiles a long list of research claims and numbers that don't add up.

The U of A has yet to answer her requests for clarification on those points, though its latest letter to Krause promised a response sometime in January.

In the meantime, the masses who have swallowed the sea lice story whole and are diligently lobbying against fish farms, which provide employment and generate real revenue, not taxpayer welfare, in rural towns along B.C.'s coast, should read Krause's *Sea Lice: Research or Marketing?*

They might then be inspired to do a little scientific debunking of their own. ■

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