

10/22/2012

Is Truth a Tactic?

This blog is dedicated to [Ransom Myers](#), RAM 1952- 2007

On October 15, 2012, Anissa Reed and I purchased an Atlantic salmon from [Sobey's](#) supermarket in Truro, Nova Scotia, we had no idea what series of events would follow.

When we examine salmon we always count the number of sea lice, but there were so many on this fish that we began pulling them off and onto a plate to get an accurate count.



We took a picture. We were in a parking lot, working from a shopping cart and a previously purchased salmon from Superstore was on the lower level of the cart awaiting processing. That is why, as some have noted, there is an Atlantic Superstore shopping bag visible in some of the images.

Most of the lice were hiding under the gill flap of the Sobey's salmon, not a usual place for lice.



Many of the 28 parasitic crustaceans were gravid females full of eggs. When Anissa posted an image of the paper plate covered in lice on facebook people began to "share" the image widely. Within 24 hours there were 270 shares, we don't know how many "shares," there were from other people's facebook pages. We have never seen anything like that before. The image had "gone viral." The next day, we bought another farmed Atlantic from Sobey's - it had 33 sea lice.

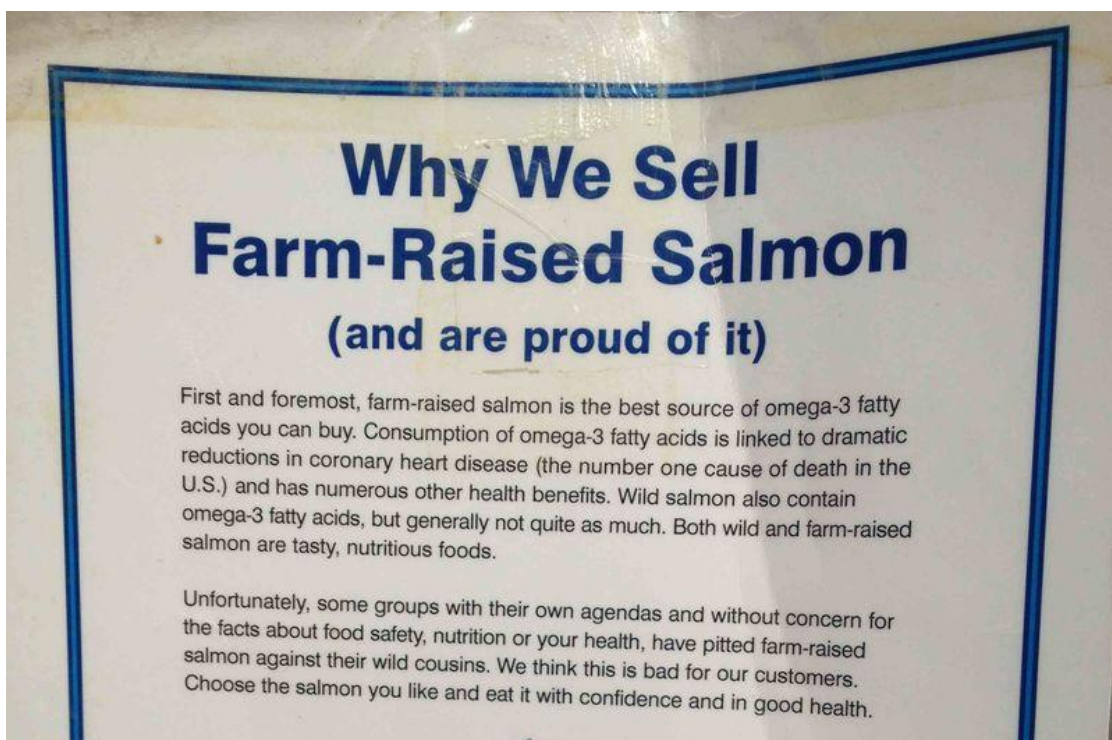


A few days later, on October 18, when tried to purchase a farm salmon from Sobeys's in St. John, New Brunswick, they told us whole Atlantic salmon had been recalled due to sea lice, and that 84 stores had pulled the product from their shelves. We went to a second Sobeys's and heard the same thing, so we went to [Lord's Lobster](#) in the Saint John City Market and bought several more Atlantic salmon. The three fish had 24, 29, and approximately 100 sea lice.





Lord's had a sign on their fish counter saying there were groups with their own agenda pitting farm-raised salmon against wild. I wondered if they are talking about the small communities throughout the Maritimes trying to hold onto their way of life, their fisheries, their schools and economy?



Clearly one salmon farm or more is harvesting salmon in the Maritimes with a serious sea lice problem. The fish had extensive damage to their backs where many of the lice were attached.

On October 18, we went to the [Fisherman's Market](#) in Bedford. These fish, advertised as "utility grade," had 54 and 30 sea lice. The poor creatures had lost part of their heads to sea lice. The skin was eaten away and raw flesh exposed.



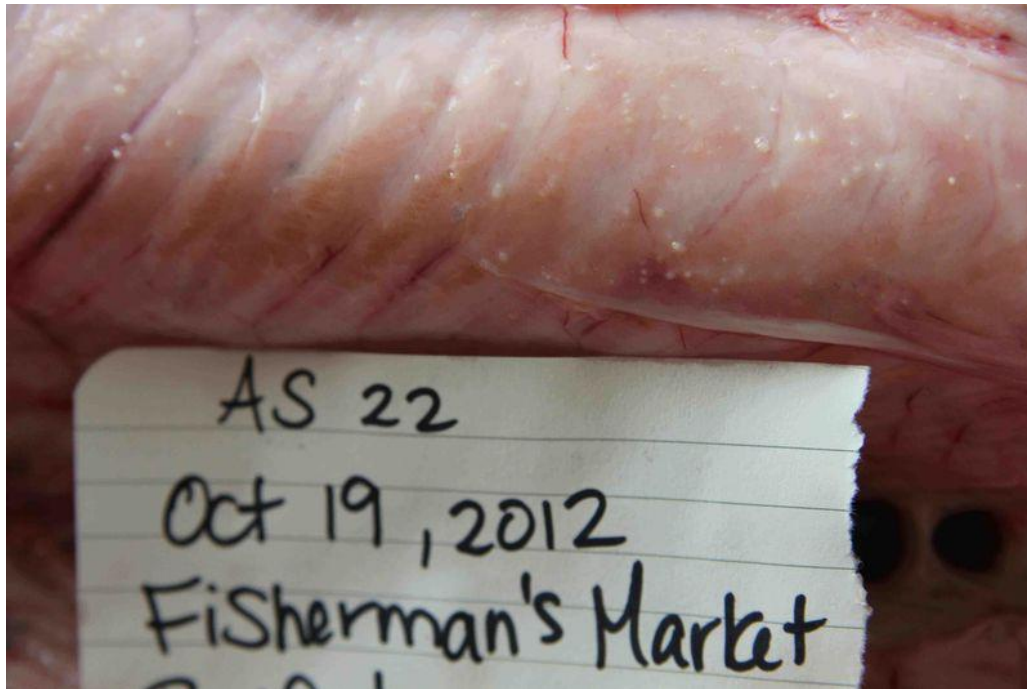
Inka Milewski, Science Advisor for the Conservation Council of New Brunswick, joined us in the autopsy. <http://www.conservationcouncil.ca/Chaleur-to-Tormentine/>



Testifying before the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans on November 29, 2011, Milewski, who has done 34 years of scientific fieldwork on impact of salmon farms knows about the potential for the drugs used to kill sea lice to harm lobster populations – the most valuable fishery in Canada.

“Despite failing to meet the criteria that DFO has set out, these farms have been granted permits to operate. In fact, in the case of Shelburne Harbour, these are now before the courts; the decisions that have been made by the province with advice from DFO have landed these farm applications in court. It's similar in St. Mary's Bay. Fishermen have come forward and said the farms were being put where they fish lobster. The consultants for the proponent for the fish farm have taken bottom video at a time of the year when we would not expect to see lobster and have said, “Look, we didn't find any lobster here. Therefore this is not lobster bottom.” Yet they've ignored the experience and the expertise of people who have fished those areas for 30 years. This is what I'm saying.”

Inka ran her hands over hard yellow pimples along the inside of one of the salmon, saying, “I have seen this before, I will look this up and get back to you.” While the salmon had quite a few lice, the extreme damage to their heads suggested far more lice had been there recently.



From these simple observations, that there are sea lice on farm salmon being sold in New Brunswick, PEI, and Nova Scotia, came a flurry of media stories, 100's of comments and some heated accusations. Usually I just let this kind of thing go, but it broke my heart going community to community for the past 10 days and hearing how big business salmon farmers have invaded communities against their will supported by all levels of government.

When you see fish disfigured by lice, you know the salmon farmers are losing money on that fish. Sea lice in the Maritimes have become resistant to drugs. This has been noted by the University of PEI scientist [John F. Burka](#)

In the [Multi-National Sea Lice R&D Meeting](#), Bergen Norway, Feb 10 & 11, 2010 on sea lice, it is recognized that salmon farm sea lice are now resistant to drugs throughout New Brunswick. New drugs called "AlphaMax", "Salmosan," "Calicide," have been used in an attempt to kill the parasite. It goes on to say bath treatments are now being used. This is where a farm is diapered in tarps and the drug added to the water, or the fish are pumped into a "well-boat" treated and then the fish pumped back out the tank emptied. When I see adult salmon damaged by sea lice, it suggests even these new drugs are failing.

While the greatest known impact of sea lice in BC is damage to juvenile salmon migrating near salmon farms where billions of larval lice can be wafting out of these marine feedlots, the issue in eastern Canada has more to do with the drugs. In the losing arms race, the fish farmers are trying to kill a parasitic crustacean. Since sea lice and lobsters are both crustaceans, it is not surprising the drug appears to kill lobster, including, potentially the larval lobster.

The media

Sobey's took a good step in recalling the product, but if they are truly committed to the communities they have their stores in, they need to tell the public where these fish came from and what drug is being used to protect the lobster fishermen.

October 18

CBC reports "[Sobey's pulls whole salmon from stores](#)" featuring the picture of the paper plate with all the sea lice.

A quote from the article:

"The decision to pull the salmon appears to be the result of a campaign launched by anti fish farming activist Alexandra Morton."

October 19

CBC does a second story: [Fish Farmers defend Atlantic salmon after recall](#)

A quote from the story:

“The Atlantic Canada Fish Farmers Association says sea lice is not a risk to human health after it was found on whole Atlantic salmon at Sobeys.

The grocery chain pulled the fish from shelves Thursday after anti-fish farming activist Alexandra Morton posted a photo of lice on the fish on Facebook.

In response, the Fish Farmers Association issued a release touting the benefits of Atlantic salmon.”

This story was not open to comments. The first mention of sea lice as a threat to human health seems to have originated with the Atlantic Canada Fish Farmers Association.

Next came the Global News story which shifted the focus to me, not sea lice on farm salmon: [Anti-fish farming activist Alexandra Morton](#)

A quote from the story:

“There’s a certain need for people bringing awareness to public so everyone is paying attention,” said Dr. Larry Hammell, the director of the Centre for Aquatic Health Sciences.

“But the pendulum can swing too far. It starts to be an issue with inflaming half the points so people are afraid rather than dealing with science of it.”

Hammell said this is what happened with the pictures and Sobeys’ response. Morton knows sea lice pose no human health risk, but many people may not, so she took advantage of the situation, Hammell said.

Morton’s Crusade

Morton is an activist that has become a movement campaigning against the salmon farm-fishing industry. ”

I never said sea lice were a human health issue. I have a call into Dr. Hammell’s office, he must have been misinformed, or misquoted.

I was flown to Halifax by Dalhousie University to deliver the [5th annual Ransom Myers lecture](#). Dr. Myers, or RAM, as he is known by his many friends and colleagues, was a man familiar with the controversy that block progress in protecting the wild fisheries of Canada. Wild fisheries are not decorative luxury items. They fuel local economies, they are food security, they keep the oceans alive, which in turn regulate ocean climate – something they are essential to the survival of humankind.

Communities throughout Nova Scotia and New Brunswick ask me to visit them. They want to tell me about the impact of salmon farms on them.



They are fighting for their communities, they are hoping for solutions. I was deeply affected hearing fisherman after fisherman tell me that the drugs being used to kill sea lice are killing lobster. They all repeated that herring weirs stop producing, as soon as, salmon farms appear. Fishermen of the Eastern Shore, Shelbourne County, Freeport, St Andrews, Deer Island, Grand Manan – all said the same thing. Did they plot together to make up a story, learn their lines to repeat to me? NO, that would be ludicrous! I believe them and seeing farm salmon that are so damaged by lice that they are offered to the public as low cost “utility grade” suggests to me that some farm in the Maritimes has sea lice so resistant to drugs that they are out of control. Question is what drug is going to be used next and does that drug belong in public waters affecting the biggest fishery in Canada – lobster?

Pam Parker, Executive Director of the Atlantic Canada was quoted in the Global news Article: “We do not believe that sea lice in our farms have any impact on wild salmon.”

This was a shocker. [Ms. Parker](#) was an administrator of the \$3 million BC Pacific Salmon Forum in 2008. I was one of the researchers, partnered with DFO, and one of the resulting recommendations called for delousing of farm salmon when nearby juvenile wild salmon became infected with more lice than normal. This was expressly to wild salmon from death by farm salmon-origin sea lice. Parker moved straight from that job, to her current position to promote salmon farming. I don't see how she can still not "believe" sea lice from salmon farms are not a problem for wild salmon.

I was sent pictures by a Maritimes biologist of sea lice on wild Atlantic salmon



Vivian Krause chimed in in the Global News Story casting doubt on my integrity:

"Morton received funding from the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, which she said supports the wild salmon industry and is against farm-fishing practices.

"If your research is being funded by folks that want to kill an industry, you must disclose that."

Krause has insinuated this before. The fact is, when the Moore Foundation funded a coalition of environmental groups in BC to reach an agreement with Marine Harvest, the biggest salmon farmer in the world, I left the coalition, because the deal supported doubling the production license of salmon feedlots against the wishes of the First Nations whose territory they were sited in. The wild salmon I was studying would not survive this. I walked away from the money.

While Krause is right, we do need to look at where the money comes from research needs funding. Boats, fuel, people's time all require money. Dr. Hammell lists Cooke Aquaculture as a "[collaborator](#)." Cooke is the dominant fish farmer in the Maritimes. That should not matter because science attempts safe-guards through peer – review. When I write a paper on the impact of sea lice from salmon farms, the journal sends my work to scientists they hope will be my fiercest opponents. The editors evaluate the comments and they decided more than 20 times to publish my work in the most prestigious fisheries journals in the world.

In a third article, Dr. Hammell goes on: "

A quote from the [article](#):

Larry Hammell, a professor of aquaculture health management at the Atlantic Veterinary College in Charlottetown, says the action was not necessary.

"There is absolutely no human health concern associated with them (sea lice)...there is no reason scientifically to remove these salmon from the shelves," said Hammell.

He says since food safety is not affected by sea lice Morton's campaign amounts to nothing more than fear mongering.

"It's a scare tactic," he said.

"I have to admit it is a pretty effective one."

If people are scared, then sea lice on farm salmon are scary. When does making something public become a "tactic?" I think people deserve the truth about things they are buying to eat, things that are raised in their communities.

There were 107 "comments" posted below some of the articles above. Most people expressed distrust of the government, and the salmon farming industry and voiced concern that the industry is damaging the rural economic backbone of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick coastal communities – lobster fishing – the most valuable fishery in Canada.

However, others that did not identify themselves felt differently.

madmanhenderson

2012/10/18
at 4:16 PM ET

Rating
183

238  55 

What a coincidence. Alexandra Morton and Annissa Read come to town and suddenly they have a picture of a salmon on plate alongside some sea lice. What a fortunate turn of events for these anti-salmon warriors. I'm sure they couldn't wait to post the picture on their facebook page Particularly as they have been accused of presenting false test results and breaking into bio secure farms in BC and stealing samples. Guess it was their lucky day. Sorry CBC for posting these links from a competitor.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=cFnoPGVrvsU#!

<http://bc.ctvnews.ca/fish-test-results-demand-follow-up-former-minister-1.884207>

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ech2thr0wn

2012/10/18
at 5:06 PM ET

Rating
-21

28  49 

madman if I were you I'd start looking at the salmon you are purchasing. And, I'd start wondering how nutritious it can be after having so much of the life sucked out of it by these parasites and then if pesticides have been used on it, again how nutritious is it and how good is it for you? Not to mention the environmental degradation that takes place surrounding these feedlots. Any of these industrial feedlots are if nothing else inhumane.

Hide replies

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pepsi lover

2012/10/18
at 9:51 PM ET

sue them sobeys sue theses ladies for say 1 million each plus costs.

thatsjustme
2012/10/19
at 10:13 AM ET

Rating
1

10 9
👍 👎

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Alexandra Morton has to be sued to prevent this fear mongering and serious defamation both of Sobey's and the people that farm those fish.

Everybody knows that you clean (de-scale) fish before you eat them...same as you clean chicken or potatoes or vegetables. Most consumers already know that most all of our fruits and vegetables are sprayed with gas/chemicals to get them to preserve for months...ask any vegetable or fruit grower such as potato farm or apple grower if you should clean it before eating and they will say...duh! to clean them

ech2thr0wn
2012/10/19
at 11:20 AM ET

Rating
2

4 2
👍 👎

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I'd like the power to sue our derelict governments that put us in the positions of having no wild fish left and the corporations that pollute our environment to the point of deplorable food quality. Where do you see us getting our food from 40 years from now thatsjustyou?

Rimshot40
2012/10/19
at 6:04 PM ET

Rating
1

1 0
👍 👎

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And then you wonder why does everyone have cancer...? Buy organic food people!

The debate rages on. Karen Crocker lobster fisherman and tourism operator is [taking the heat](#) today. Karen I hope the people who are fighting this industry back you up, you are a brave person, a fisherman and tourism operator.

On Friday night, I presented the 5th annual Ransom Myer lecture to about 400 academics, politicians, students and fishermen. My account of the government cover up of the impact of salmon feedlots on wild salmon in western Canada drew the first-ever standing ovation for this series.



I feel certain RAM would approve that I gave this lecture in carrying his name amid the controversy sparked last week by a single picture. Dr. Myers stood strong against Fisheries and Ocean Canada. When he discovered the cod of the North Western Atlantic were going down he informed DFO how to avert the looming collapse. DFO told RAM, a young scientist at the time, to sit down and be quiet. He told me it took him about 7 minutes to quit. He spent his life as a powerful voice for truth and rigorous scientist, mentoring an entire generation of brilliant young scientists. RAM visited me just before he was diagnosed with terminal cancer. He was about to enter the salmon farm fight with a [seminal paper](#) with Jennifer Ford on the world-wide decline of wild salmon wherever salmon feedlots appear.

He told me DFO is a “criminal organization.” I was not ready to hear that then. I thought his statement was extreme. But after ten days at the kitchen tables of fishermen, tourism operators, people six generations on a piece of land, children asking me if salmon farms were going to kill off the livelihoods of their parents and women saying they hoped their children would find their way out of their dying communities, I have to agree.

Imagine if DFO had listened to Dr. Ransom Myers. Imagine if abundant cod were still being harvested by eastern Canada. Imagine what they would mean for Nova Scotia and the health these fish could have brought to people eating this food brimming with nutrition.

The only hope I can see is for the people who know the wild fish to band together and make the decision for themselves where and whether the salmon farms belong in their waters.

As for the anonymous person, hiding behind a pseudonym posting that I should be sued for a million dollars....

Bring it on! Let's take this into the courts. This is about much more than a dirty little sunset industry, this is about the future of our planet.

