Organochlorines and heavy metals in wild caught food as a potential human health risk to the indigenous Māori population of South Canterbury, New Zealand

Authors: Stewart M et al

Summary: Selected bioaccumulative contaminants were investigated in wild kai (food) of cultural, recreational and economic importance to the indigenous Māori of South Canterbury, New Zealand. Contaminants of concern included dieldrin, ΣPCBs, p,p’-DDE, mercury and arsenic, levels of which were analysed in important kai species including eel (Anguilla sp.), brown trout (Salmo trutta), black flounder (Rhombosolea reticulata) and watercress (Nasturtium officinale) from important harvesting sites in the region of South Canterbury. Calculations revealed a lifetime excess cancer risk was associated with consumption of eels, trout and flounder. In another analysis, a non-cancer chronic health risk was associated with consumption of eels and trout. A cumulative lifetime cancer risk assessment demonstrated a potential health risk in consuming some species, even at low consumption rates. The study authors recommend that dietary consumption limits be established for harvest sites within the study region.

Comment: An excellent article demonstrating the need for quality research in papa kainga, Māori communities and sites of engagement with the environment such as fishing or harvesting sites. The impact of environmental contamination is far reaching, affecting the wellbeing of our ecosystems, our kai, traditional knowledge and of course health outcomes.


Independent commentary by Dr Matire Harwood

Dr Matire Harwood (Ngapuhi) has worked in Hauora Māori, primary health and rehabilitation settings as clinician and researcher since graduating from Auckland Medical School in 1994. She also holds positions on a number of boards, committees and advisory groups including the Health Research Council. Matire lives in Auckland with her whānau including partner Haunui and two young children Te Rangiura and Waimarie.

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...highlights issues relevant to Māori health, profiles Māori health and disability service providers, examining their role in relation to whānau, hapu, iwi, Māori health organisations and DHBs. This publication also applauds and celebrates achievements in Māori health.

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