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# Lessons learned from an old herring fishery

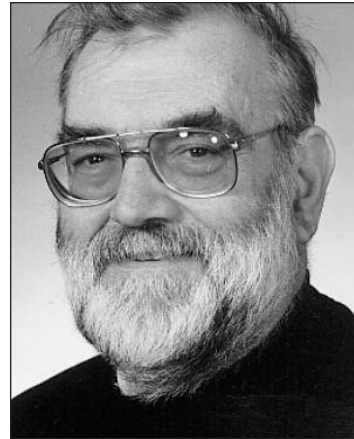
## Climate change compounds threat of pollution

**A**s our planet's population grows, the need for food seems to escape the attention of the people in power, right around the globe.

Climate change is a big — maybe the biggest — issue that needs to be seriously addressed, not only for the sustainability of our own species but also for the other biological species that have evolved on the only habitable planet we know.

Here where I live, in Richmond, for example, some of the most agriculturally-suitable farmland is being built on and purposely contaminated in order to destroy it for agricultural use. That way, it can be used in the future for residential and commercial development, with easy dollars in mind instead of the food-growing sustainability of future generations.

Farmers are standing up to try and defend this vitally important habitat on Finn Road — a productive piece of farmland until 2011 — against the dumping of



**Fisheries**  
*Joe Bauer*

demolition materials. The debris includes huge pieces of concrete, filled with rebar, wire mesh and other contaminants. It will affect not only the soil, but the water table below — in effect the whole ecosystem.

Without dykes, this land would be under water on the high tides. Even though it is now dyked, the tidal effect on the water table continues, with any contaminants able to enter adjacent aquatic habitats that are vital to the rearing of fish and other species. Contaminating those waters would affect all of the life forms that up to today have allowed our fisheries to harvest healthy food from both the freshwater and marine environment.

Climate change adds to the problem. Climatic warming could see new parasites and other disease pathogens invade affected habitats, posing new risks to species that may not have had time to develop defences against them and cannot adapt.

In my 59 years of fishing, I've seen many changes. One that really sticks in my mind is the loss of the Point Grey herring that we used to fish as a food source, for smoking and pickling. The fishery took place off the north flats (Sturgeon Bank) in the middle arm of the Fraser River.

When the sewage system was first installed at Iona Island, the outfall pipe that was built along the Iona Jetty directed the untreated sewage straight out into the Gulf of Georgia. The last year I fished for herring, I got six very diseased herring and over 1,500 condoms (my deckhand actually counted them).

This very valuable fishery collapsed in a very short time, never to recover. Overfishing was certainly not the problem. The issue was habitat destruction. Had common sense — seemingly missing in many of our leaders, then and now — prevailed at the time, the outcome might have been very different.

To survive, we have to learn again to work with Mother Nature, because the biosphere is a community to which we belong, not simply a source of resources belonging to us alone. We have stewardship for the quality of air, water and soil for which that community depends, now and in the future.

Sustainable development means maintaining and even enhancing the integrity of our natural habitat, and contributing to the wellbeing of all species. In the end, contaminating the soil and polluting our waters threatens the survival of all of us.



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