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Commentary

A Very Inconvenient Truth

by Captain Paul Watson

The meat industry is one of the most destructive ecological industries on the planet. The raising and slaughtering of pigs, cows, sheep, turkeys and chickens not only utilizes vast areas of land and vast quantities of water, but it is a greater contributor to greenhouse gas emissions than the automobile industry.

The seafood industry is literally plundering the ocean of life and some fifty percent of fish caught from the oceans is fed to cows, pigs, sheep, chickens etc in the form of fish meal. It also takes about fifty fish caught from the sea to raise one farm raised salmon.

We have turned the domestic cow into the largest marine predator on the planet. The hundreds of millions of cows grazing the land and farting methane consume more tonnage of fish than all the worlds sharks, dolphins and seals combined. Domestic housecats consume more fish, especially tuna, than all the world's seals.

So why is it that all the world's large environmental and conservation groups are not campaigning against the meat industry? Why did Al Gore's film *Inconvenient Truth* not mention the inconvenient truth that the slaughter industry creates more greenhouse gases than the automobile industry?

The Greenpeace ships serve meat and fish to their crews everyday. The World Wildlife Fund does not say a word about the threat that meat eating poses for the survival of wildlife, the habitat destroyed, the wild competitors for land eliminated, or the predators destroyed to save their precious livestock.

When I was a Sierra Club director for three years, everyone looked amused when I brought up the issue of vegetarianism. At each of our Board meeting dinners, the Directors were served meat and only after much prodding and complaining did the couple of vegetarian directors manage to get a vegetarian option. At our meeting in Montana we were served Buffalo and antelope, lobsters in Boston, crabs in Charleston, steak in Albuquerque etc. But what else can we expect from a conservation group that endorses trophy hunting.

As far as I know and I may be wrong, but my organization, the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society is the only conservation organization in the world that endorses and practises vegetarianism. My ships

do not serve meat or fish ever, nor do we serve dairy products. We've had a strictly vegan menu for years and no one has died of scurvy or malnutrition.

The price we pay for this is to be accused by other conservation organizations of being animal rights. Like it's a bad word. They say it with the same disdain that Americans used to utter the word communist in the Fifties.

The Sea Shepherd Conservation Society is not an animal rights organization. We are exclusively involved in interventions against illegal activities that threaten and exploit marine wildlife and habitat. We are involved in ocean wildlife conservation activities.

Yet because we operate our ships as vegan vessels, other groups, and now the media dismiss us as an animal rights organization.

Now first of all I don't see being accused of as an animal rights organization to be an insult. PETA was co-founded by one of my crew-members and many of my volunteers come from the animal rights movement. But it is not accurate to refer to Sea Shepherd as animal rights when our organization pushes a strict conservation enforcement policy.

And secondly we do not promote veganism on our ships because of animal rights. We promote veganism as a means of practising what we preach which is ocean conservation.

There is not enough fish in the world's oceans to feed 6.6 billion human beings and another 10 billion domestic animals. That is why all the world's commercial fisheries are collapsing. That is why whales, seals, dolphins and seabirds are starving. The sand eel for example, the primary source of food for the comical and beautiful puffin is being wiped out by Danish fishermen solely to provide fish meal to Danish factory farmed chickens.

This is a solid conservation connection between eating meat and the destruction of life in our oceans.

In a world fast losing resources of fresh water, it is sheer lunacy to have hundreds of millions of cows consuming over 1,000 gallons of water for every pound of beef produced.

And the pig farms in North Carolina produce so much waste that it has contaminated the entire ground water reserves of the entire state. North Carolinians drink pig *bleep* with their water but its okay they say, they just neutralize it with chemicals like chlorine.

Most people don't want to see where their meat comes from. They also don't want to know what the impact of their meat has on the ecology. They would rather just deny the whole thing and pretend that meat is something that comes in packages from the store.

But because there is this underlying guilt always present, it manifests itself as anger and ridicule towards people who live the most environmentally positive life styles on the planet-- the vegans and the vegetarians.

This is demonstrated through constant marginalization especially in the media. Any organization, like Sea Shepherd for example, that points out the ecological contradictions of eating meat is immediately dismissed as some wacko animal rights organization.

I did not set the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society up as an animal rights organization and we have never promoted animal rights in the organization. What we have promoted and what we do is oceanic wildlife and habitat conservation work.

And the truth is that you can't practise solid and constructive conservation work without promoting veganism and/or vegetarianism as something that promotes the conservation of resources.

A few years ago I attended a dinner meeting of the American Oceans Campaign hosted by Ted Danson. He opened the dinner by saying that the choice he had to make was between fish and chicken for the dinner, and what was the point of saving fish if you can't eat them?

Guest speaker, Oceanographer Sylvia Earle put Ted in his place by saying she did not think that he was being very funny. She said that she considered fish to be her friends and she did not believe in eating her friends. So neither Sylvia nor I ate dinner that night.

I met Sylvia again at another meeting, this time of Conservation International held at some ritzy resort in the Dominican Republic. Harrison Ford was there and the buzz was what could be done to save the oceans. I was invited as an advisor. I sat on a barstool in an open beachfront dining plaza as the conservationists approached tables literally bending from the weight of fish and exotic seafood including caviar. I looked at Sylvia Earle and she just shook her head and rolled her eyes.

The problem is that people like Carl Pope, the Executive Director of the Sierra Club, or the heads of Greenpeace, World Wildlife Fund, Conservation International and many other big groups just refuse to accept that their eating habits may be just as much a part of the problem as all those things they are trying to oppose.

I remember one Greenpeacer defending his meat eating by saying that he was a carnivore and that predators have their place and he was proud to be one.

Now the word predator in relationship to human beings has a rather scary connotation having nothing to do with eating habits, but for any human being to describe themselves as a carnivore is just plain ridiculous.

Humans are not and have never been carnivores. A lion is a carnivore as is a wolf, as is a tiger, or a shark. Carnivores eat live animals. They stalk them, they run them down, they pounce, they kill, and they eat, blood dripping, meat at body temperature. Nature,

brutal red in tooth and claw.

I've never met a human that can do that. Yes we found ways to run down animals and kill them. In fact we've come to be rather efficient at the killing part. But we can't eat the prey until we cut it up and cook it and that usually involves some time between kill and eating. It could be an hour or it could be years.

You see our meat eating habits are more closely related to the vulture, the jackal or other carrion eaters. This means that we can't be described as carnivores. We are better described as necrovores or eaters of rotting flesh.

Consider that some of the beef that people eat has been dead for months and in some cases for years. Dead and hanging in freezers, full of uritic acid and bacteria. It's a corpse in a state of decomposition. Not much that can be said to be noble about eating a cadaver.

But a little dose of denial allows us to bite into that Big Mac or cut into that prime rib.

But that one 16 ounce cut of prime rib is equal to a thousand gallons of fresh water, a few acres of grass, a few fish, a quarter acre of corn etc. What's the point of taking a shorter shower to conserve water as Greenpeace is preaching if you can sit down and consume a 1000 gallons of water at a single meal?

And that single cut of meat would have cost as much in vegetable resources equivalent to what could be fed to an entire African village for a week.

The problem is that we choose to see our contradictions when it is convenient for us to see them and when it is not we simply go into a state of suspended disbelief and we eat that steak anyway because, hey we like the taste of rotting flesh in the evening.

Have you ever thought why it is that with a person, it's an abortion but when it comes to a chicken, it's an omelette?

Does anyone really know what's in a hot dog? We do know that the government health department allows for an acceptable percentage of bug parts, rodent droppings and other assorted filth to go into the mix.

And now tuna fish comes with a health warning saying it should not be eaten by pregnant women or small children because of high levels of mercury. Does that mean mercury is good for adults and non-pregnant women? What are they telling us here?

Eating meat and fish is not only bad for the environment it's also unhealthy. Yet even when it comes to our own health we slip into denial mode and order the whopper.

The bottom line is that to be a conservationist and an environmentalist, you must practice and promote vegetarianism or better yet veganism.

It is the lifestyle that leaves the shallowest ecological footprint, uses fewer resources and produces less greenhouse gas emissions, its healthier and it means you're not a hypocrite.

In fact a vegan driving a hummer would be contributing less greenhouse gas carbon emissions than a meat eater riding a bicycle.



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