

Title: Half-Baked Plan for Oysters Foiled: Washington Spray Permit Cancelled with your calls and emails heard!

Source: May 2015 issue, *NCAP Action News*

The recent controversy over the application of the neurotoxic insecticide imidacloprid to Washington's coastal oyster beds highlights the pivotal role consumer sentiment now plays in demanding sustainable food and clean water. In the oyster case, the EPA approved the use of the highly persistent and mobile imidacloprid on the shellfish beds despite the fact that imidacloprid's regular label warns that the product should not be applied to water. Then, the Washington Department of Ecology issued its permit even after receiving pointed written warnings from the National Marine Fisheries Service that the use of the pesticide would kill nearly all benthic, or bottom dwelling, organisms in the treated areas, and that impacts beyond the treated areas would be felt by Pacific salmon, groundfish, smelt, and other ESA-listed green sturgeon. But it was only when chefs and eaters became aware of the issue that the oyster growers backed off, and Ecology cancelled the permit.

NCAP had submitted comments with other partners last year to implore the Department of Ecology not to issue the permit. We urged them to seek options that did not involve pesticides toxic to so much of that particular ecosystem from the water itself to shrimp and fish and birds. When we were notified that the permit would go into effect, we informed our network through social media and wrote an op ed for the Seattle Times (that wasn't published).

You responded and many calls and emails resulted urging the oyster industry and the Department of Ecology to find other options and to cancel the permit.

Imidacloprid, together with its neonicotinoid cousins, was already under scrutiny from the EPA and the USDA due to documented impacts from this group of pesticides to pollinators. Indeed, the recommendations of the federal Pollinator Health Task Force, just released this week, is the subject of another article in this newsletter.

Alternatives exist. The organic industry is now worth \$35 billion annually in the U.S. For oyster production in Washington, pesticides have been used for years, but the burrowing shrimp population has remained relatively steady, and oyster productivity has expanded despite the shrimp. There is serious doubt about why pesticide uses are justified when the outcomes are essentially unchanged.

Protecting community and environmental health is one of the most fundamental responsibilities of democratic governments. But all too often, decision-makers hear primarily from those who have a direct economic stake. The oyster crisis showed that agencies will sometimes listen to public voices. It's time to let the EPA know that these pesticides pose too great a risk to our environment to allow business as usual. Federal action is necessary. Neonics should be suspended while complete studies are completed on their safety.

