

## Radioactively contaminated seafood

There is no safe dose of radiation. Exposure to radiation at any level can increase the risk of developing radiation-linked diseases like cancer. The way to minimise the risk is to minimise exposure to radiation as far as possible.

Whereas all living things have evolved in an environment that includes naturally occurring radiation (like that coming from the sun), we receive additional exposure from the fall-out from atomic bomb explosions and from the nuclear industry's accidents and daily deliberate pollution. Without the nuclear industry, these sources of radiation exposure would not exist. The nuclear industry is therefore responsible for threatening our health and, because of the long-lived nature of some its pollution, the health of future generations.

The radioactive pollution from the nuclear industry is discharged into the sea and air around us, causing us to be 'directly' exposed to radiation. We are exposed to it 'indirectly' through consuming contaminated food and drink.

Sellafield's reprocessing of nuclear waste is responsible for the largest source of radioactive pollution in the UK. It is not surprising that this pollution ends up in the food we eat.

In the UK, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (MAFF and SEPA) carry out official monitoring of the radioactive contamination of our food. They jointly publish their findings in an annual report entitled "*Radioactivity in Food and the Environment*<sup>1</sup>". In their latest publication, the extent of Sellafield's radioactive impact is highlighted:

*"Historically disposals from Sellafield have had the greatest impact on food and the environment of the UK."*

In particular, MAFF and SEPA mention the effect of Sellafield's discharges of liquid wastes into the sea – some eight million litres every day::

"The highest estimated doses were due to liquid discharges from the reprocessing plant at Sellafield".

The creatures that live in the Irish Sea - the most radioactively contaminated sea in the world - are directly exposed to pollution from Sellafield's nuclear waste discharge pipe. The Government's official monitoring of the radiation has found a number of dangerous radioactive substances in everything from lobsters to cod.

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<sup>1</sup> MAFF/SEPA, Radioactivity in Food and the Environment, 1998, RIFE-4, September 1999, ISSN 1365-6414

As a consequence, people who eat seafood caught in the vicinity of Sellafield are prone to receive the highest doses of radiation, a fact recognised by MAFF:

*"Important radiation exposure pathways were consumption of fish and shellfish and external exposure to gamma rays and beta particles from human occupancy over sediments."*

As this seafood can end up in markets, shops and restaurants throughout Europe, the health risk from eating radioactively food is spread.

For nearly 50 years Sellafield has been discharging radioactive pollution into the sea. Some of this pollution has spread far and wide in sea currents. But the pollution is also spread wherever fish and seafood from the Irish Sea is sold. The only way to not add to the problem is for Sellafield to cease reprocessing.