Reid Visits Fishermen on the Hudson And Warns Them of PCB Pollution

By RICHARD SEVERO
Special to The New York Times

VERPLANCK, N.Y., Oct. 17—The story was the same wherever he went: The fishermen told Ogden R. Reid they had never seen the Hudson look cleaner, nor the fish bigger and in such abundance.

All he could tell them in return was that the problem was not what they could see, but a poison they could not see and that he would do everything he could to stop its discharge into the river.

For Mr. Reid, the State's Commissioner of Environmental Conservation, it was a melancholy day he felt he had to spend with fishermen, to try to explain to them what a toxic group of chemicals called PCBs were and to get their ideas on what the state might do to save commercial fishing on the Hudson River.

A 'Bombshell'

By helicopter, Mr. Reid and his aides visited 20 fishermen at Verplanck, Garrison, Poughkeepsie and Cleverack. They spent the day with men who, in some instances, had spent their lives fighting for a cleaner river, only to learn that what appeared to be clean contained a chemical they had never heard of until they read of it in their newspapers last August.

PCBs — polychlorinated biphenyls, used in the manufacture of capacitors and transformers — have been found in dangerously high levels in fish in the Hudson River. They have also been found in lakes in New York State, as well as in Lake Michigan, the Mississippi system, in the Far West and in places abroad.

Mr. Reid has already warned consumers to be wary of Hudson River fish. Between now and next spring, when all tests are completed, he will have to decide if the Hudson River fishery can be salvaged at all.

"I've been fishing this river since 1946," said Robert Gabrielson of Nyack. "In one year in the nineteen-sixties, fishing was so bad that, after I paid all my expenses, I made only $60.

"I thought that this year, at last, I could make a living from the river and devote all my time to it. Now they drop this bombshell on me . . . I tell you, if they keep finding stuff like this, we're not going to be able to eat anything."

Vows 'Early Decision'

State and Federal researchers have traced the major portion of the Hudson River's problem to two General Electric plants at Fort Edward and Hudson Falls, north of Albany. Mr. Reid has told the company he wants no discharges after Sept. 30, 1976, but General Electric says it cannot comply by that date.

A hearing has been called and testimony will begin on Nov. 3. The full scope of what PCBs do to humans remains unclear, although skin disease and liver ailments have been documented. It has caused reproductive failures and cancer in laboratory tests. Mr. Reid explained to about 15 fishermen gathered around him under a weeping willow tree near the water's edge.

"We've got to know something soon," said Howard Jordan, who fishes out of Stony Point. "We've got to get out nets ready now and we are talking about $1,200 or $1,500 a man. We need someone to say, 'If you invest this money and your fish can't be sold, you get your money back.'"

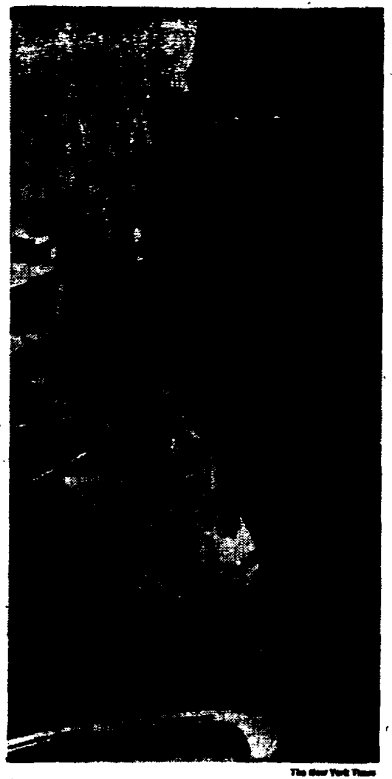
"You are entitled to an early decision," Mr. Reid replied, "and I'll try to get some information back to you within a month. But on the shad, we really can't say for sure how much they are affected until we catch some in the spawning season next spring."

He explained that since shad feed on plankton rather than on smaller fish and since they ate almost nothing before spawning, they might not be as contaminated as such species as striped bass and yellow perch.

"I haven't given up on the Hudson," Mr. Reid said. "It is cleaner, except for the PCBs, and it is possible that if we stop General Electric from dumping more of them into the river, we could see a tremendous improvement in a few years."

Among other things, the state has asked Dr. Edgar Garbisch, a specialist in aquatic vegetation, to give proposals for a study to determine if PCBs could be absorbed by planting marsh grass up river, near the sites of the discharges.

Mr. Reid said he also planned to provide research money to Dr. Michael Baden, deputy chief medical examiner of New York, to study PCB levels in bodies examined at the morgue, determining, if possible, any correlation between the chemical's presence and diseases detected during autopsies.



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Ogden R. Reid, State Commissioner of Environmental Conservation, at edge of dock, meeting with a group of Hudson River fishermen Wednesday at Verplanck, N.Y. The men were concerned about pollution problems.

LOTTERY NUMBERS
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N. J. Daily—64128
N. J. Pick-It Lottery—235

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