

The Sensible Environmentalist

It's Time to Boycott—Boycotts

(NAPS)—DEAR DR. MOORE:
Do you support boycotts as a way to force environmental gains?

I used to, but I've come to believe that boycotts have unintended consequences, many of which are harmful to the environment and human health.



Dr. Moore

In the early '90s, for example, a number of groups called for a boycott of wood from tropical forests, hoping to encourage improved logging practices. As a result, demand dropped and prices collapsed. Unfortunately, the landowners didn't react according to plan. They harvested at even faster rates—but instead of reforestation they planted crops that had value on the world market, such as bananas and papayas. If the world didn't want the wood from their forests, what incentive did they have to plant more trees?

Today consumers are being urged to boycott, among other things, farmed salmon. Forget, for a moment, that the study used to support the boycott actually indicated that farmed salmon is safe to eat. Forget also, that organizations ranging from the American Heart Association to the World Health Organization have voiced strong support for farmed salmon.

Many consumers have already been persuaded. Some have turned to other proteins, thereby reducing their intake of Omega 3 fatty acids—which have been shown to protect against heart disease and Alzheimer's. Others are eating only wild salmon, increasing pressure on wild fish populations and putting them at risk.

When I helped co-found Greenpeace in the early 1970s, no one was inviting us to share our views or help shape policy. Harm was being done to this planet and no one seemed aware of the fate that surely awaited humankind if we continued unchecked. Today, environmental protection is fully entrenched in North American law and environmental groups are sought for their opinions. We no longer have the same need to provoke conflict.

I began what I call the "sensible" environmental movement because I believe it's time to evolve beyond tactics such as boycotts. It is now far more effective to work with governments and industries to encourage positive change.

Dr. Patrick Moore has been a leader of the environmental movement for more than 30 years. A co-founder of Greenpeace, he holds a PhD in ecology and a BSc in forest biology. Questions can be sent to Patrick@SensibleEnvironmental.com.