

A proposal for round-table discussions on tumour diagnosis

D. BUCKE
MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD
DIRECTORATE OF FISHERIES RESEARCH
FISH DISEASES LABORATORY
THE NOTHE
WEYMOUTH
DORSET DT4 8UB

Some five years ago the late Professor Georges Balouet, in anticipation of future problems, warned fish pathologists that there was danger in wrongly describing and characterising tumours in fish and shellfish. Our late colleague's concern arose because there was an increasing number of papers published in journals, monographs, books, reviews, etc. on the subject of fish and shellfish tumours, and there often was no effort on the part of the authors to distinguish between tumours and neoplasms. However, despite Balouet's warnings, there is still confusion, especially amongst fishery biologists as opposed to medical and veterinary pathologists, on an agreement on the definition of tumours and neoplasms. The problem arises when the word 'tumour' is used in the non-specific sense where it refers to any swelling of tissue (which may include reactive lesions, xenomas, hyperplasia, developmental anomalies as well as neoplasia). 'Neoplasm' is the more specific term and refers to any new and abnormal growth, and 'neoplasia' is the process of its formation. Therefore, a 'tumour' may, or may not, be a neoplasm, but it is a term which can be too easily translated by the news media (and some scientists) into the word 'cancer', which is a highly emotive term when misused and naturally causes concern amongst the public at large. The current interest in diseases of marine fish and their possible link with pollution has highlighted the need for fish pathologists to be very clear when speaking publicly or going into print on the issue of tumours. If there is evidence of neoplastic (cancerous) changes in marine organisms, and there is

clear evidence that these conditions can be shown to be associated with pollution 'hot-spots', then the information must be presented objectively and clearly.

Our late colleague, Professor Balouet, proposed round-table discussions on tumour diagnosis, the exchange of pathological material between scientists, and the establishment of tumour registries within groups (Balouet, 1986). It is sad that he did not live long enough to pursue that particular topic which was dear to his heart. It would be fitting to continue these proposals and I would be glad to hear from EAFP scientists who would like to participate in the exchange of materials and points of view. Interested readers will find the reviews and discussion papers on cancerous diseases in aquatic animals (Harshbarger, 1984; Myers et al, 1987; Mix, 1986) an excellent background.

References

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