

## **Fish saga makes waves: MP**

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The federal government is taking the collapse of the Fraser River sockeye seriously and plans to take action, says Conservative MP John Cummins.

The Delta-Richmond East MP says he met with senior government officials in Ottawa Tuesday to impress upon them the gravity of the situation in the West Coast salmon fishery.

"I was asked to give a briefing on the situation with respect to the Fraser River sockeye," Cummins said. "My comments were well-received."

Commercial fishermen, Cummins included, have been shut out of the once-lucrative Fraser River sockeye fishery for three years in a row now. First Nations, who usually get first dibs on Fraser River sockeye, have also been shut out this year.

Although the commercial fleet is a pale ghost of what it once was, a few hundred fishermen are still based out of Steveston harbour, which is now filled with idle fishboats.

Len Koyanagi has been fishing for 35 years, and said this year's disaster, coming as it does on the heels of previous bad years, is hitting fishing families hard.

"People are cashing in RSPs, other people are going without insuring their boats," he said.

Fishermen are accustomed to taking the good with the bad, and when a bad year is expected, they reduce costs by not renewing licences and insurance and not doing repairs on their boats.

But when they are told a good year is expected, they spend thousands on gearing up, which includes boat and net repairs. Koyanagi said he spent \$710 for a licence that is useless, and \$200 for a log book, which is required by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

Cummins said some fishermen are so desperate that they are also taking unnecessary risks, like going out in bad weather, to catch other species of fish.

"They're taking chances now -- they're catching every scale they can," Cummins said.

This year's return was forecast to be roughly 10 million, based on a huge escapement of fish returning to spawn in 2005.

Less than two million sockeye have returned, resulting in curtailment of the native food fishery and a complete closure on the commercial fishery for Fraser sockeye.

Fearing a collapse similar to the one that shut down the cod fishery in Newfoundland in the early 1990s, environmentalists and fishermen alike are calling on Ottawa to do something.

Although he did not get to speak with Prime Minister Stephen Harper when he was in Ottawa Tuesday, Cummins said he did meet with senior government officials.

"I can assure you this issue on the Fraser River is of interest to the prime minister," Cummins said. "He is

extremely concerned about it and my very real sense is they will be taking some very significant action on this."

Whether that action includes a judicial inquiry remains to be seen.

Harper promised the inquiry in 2006, and Cummins continues to press for it.

"You need an impartial individual to look at all aspects of this," Cummins said.

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