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## **Province questions Ottawa's handling of fisheries Pushes for probe into sockeye collapse**

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JUSTINE HUNTER VICTORIA The B.C. government is challenging Ottawa's fisheries management after the collapse of the sockeye salmon run, asking for a public review of the "adequacy" of the Department of Fisheries and Ocean's forecasting abilities.

Environment Minister Barry Penner said yesterday a public probe is needed to restore confidence in DFO's management of the West Coast fishery.

In August, the department confirmed the number of sockeye returning to the Fraser River this year was down dramatically from the expected run of at least 10.6 million.

The current estimate is that just 1.37 million sockeye are returning this year.

"The wide disparity between the forecasted and actual returns of Fraser River sockeye is a serious issue for British Columbians," Mr. Penner said in a letter to federal Fisheries Minister Gail Shea.

He said he'd like a "comprehensive public review of the 2009 sockeye returns, the adequacy of scientific data and the capacity of forecasting techniques." Mr. Penner's letter is dated Aug. 26, although his concerns are only just coming to light now.

In an e-mailed statement yesterday, Ms. Shea said she accepts the need for a review - although she did not commit to a public forum.

"I am committed to looking at all aspects of DFO's 2009 postseason review, which involves counting the numbers of spawning salmon on spawning grounds, looking at environmental impacts, catch numbers, forecasted and actual returns," she stated.

"In addition, DFO will be considering all aspects of the salmon season, including our approach to salmon forecasting, as we work to enhance our understanding of the dynamics of salmon survival." Mr. Penner's criticism comes to light as environmentalists raise concerns that the B.C. Liberal government's green agenda is fading away.

Mr. Penner pointed to his action on the sockeye salmon issue as evidence that his government has not, in fact, lost interest in environmental issues.

The Liberal's green agenda was a significant issue in the spring election campaign, as some environmentalists vowed to punish the rival New Democratic Party for its proposal to dismantle the Liberal government's carbon tax.

Since the election, enthusiasm from some of those same sources has waned after cuts to clean-energy grants, the approval of a trophy hunt for grizzlies and the failure to act on protecting species at risk.

Tzeporah Berman, a high-profile activist, said during the election she felt "betrayed" by the NDP. Yesterday, she said she's worried now that the Liberal's green agenda is losing ground in the postelection era of fiscal restraint.

"We still have in B.C. some of the best policies in North America to address global warming and pollution. That said, we are concerned they are losing focus," she said in an interview. "What a tragedy it would be if they held firm all the way through the recession and then lost focus fighting the deficit." Faisal Moola, director of science for the David Suzuki Foundation, said he is "disturbed" that Mr. Penner is allowing a grizzly hunt to continue, despite anecdotal reports that the bears are in serious decline.

"It is surreal, this government actively promotes trophy hunting of a known species at risk," he said.

Merran Smith of Forest Ethics, who helped put the carbon tax on the public agenda in the election, said she's seen "no progress" on the file in the wake of the vote.

"The carbon tax is a strong, bold move and still deserves support," she said. "But now the budget has been gutted on many of the climate and energy initiatives, which is a real setback for B.C." This week, a new front of dissent opened when the provincial government vowed to move ahead with building a new electric power line to open up the northwest corner of the province.

The project is touted as an environmental initiative, but environmentalists are alarmed because the main purpose of the development is to attract new mining projects.

"This transmission line is anything but green," Ms. Smith said.