

# Sockeye salmon almost eliminated

VANCOUVER, British Columbia (AP) — Canadian Fisheries Minister Brian Tobin promised to restore order to the Pacific salmon fishery after a report criticized his department for its role in the disappearance of more than a million salmon last summer.

Responding to a wide-ranging report Tuesday that said a prime West Coast sockeye salmon run was almost eliminated, Tobin said he accepts all responsibility and will ensure the mistakes are not repeated.

"We will implement the board's recommendations and, in some instances, go beyond them," he told a news conference in Montreal.

The report by the Fraser River Sockeye Public Review Board said that if the department had allowed one more 12-hour opening during fishing season last August, the late run of sockeye in the Adams River might have been wiped out.

The Adams River is part of the Fraser River watershed and a major sockeye spawning river in the British Columbia Interior.

"Such an occurrence would have devastating consequences for the Pacific fishery, delaying stock-rebuilding efforts by years and bringing dire economic consequences to the province."

That example was only one of several cited by the panel, set up last September to investigate why the number of salmon returning to spawning grounds was far lower than expected.

"My department can and will

do better," Tobin said. "A lack of consensus [among fishery interests] will not be an excuse for further inaction. I will act without consensus."

He released a plan for more conservative management of fish stocks, better enforcement of native and non-native fishery groups, and a freeze on sales agreements that allow some native groups to sell their catches commercially.

John Fraser, the former fisheries minister who headed the review, said he is still unable to explain precisely what happened to the missing salmon.

"However, this is no excuse for not taking action to ensure that what happened in 1994 does not happen again," Fraser said.

The report puts much of the blame on a 1992-93 Fisheries Department reorganization that reduced spending and damaged morale among federal enforcement officers.

But in conducting its inquiries, the board also learned of a wide range of problems that led to them to conclude that "the system had become dysfunctional."

"Unless all parties work together and manage much more competently, the tragedy that befell the Atlantic cod fishery could happen here," the report said.

Among the many problems, the board found that "almost every group that appeared before the board, native and non-native, commercial and recreational, admitted that members of their group had been guilty of poaching."

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