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# Inquiry into sockeye collapse more relevant in light of 2010 record run

By [Toby Gorman - Nanaimo News Bulletin](#)

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This year's record-high sockeye run doesn't negate the need to probe for answers into why last's year's returns were disastrously low, a Nanaimo salmon expert says.

Residents and interested organizations will have an opportunity to voice their opinions on the disastrous 2009 Fraser River sockeye salmon run when the Cohen Commission of Inquiry visits the Harbour City.

The inquiry was established last fall with the appointment of Bruce Cohen as commissioner to determine what factors led to the return of just 1.5 million sockeye in the Fraser River, one of the worst returns on record.

As the commission gets ready for hearings this fall, however, a near-record 34-million sockeye return is predicted in 2010, providing fishermen with their first chance to land sockeye in four years.

David Welch, president of Nanaimo's Kintama Research Corporation, which tracks salmon on migration routes with acoustic sensors, says this year's banner run makes the Cohen inquiry even more relevant.

"What we've seen is two massive changes in two years and scientists and biologists can't tell us why," said Welch. "It's sobering there can be such a swing from the worst collapse to a record run without any known reasons for it. What if we'd had a repeat of last year?"

Welch added that many questions need answers before public policy and stock management can be implemented, especially in light of this year's celebration of a strong run.

"I don't want to spread rain on what should be a celebration, but it's a little premature. Should we make hay while the sun is shining and catch as many fish as we can or should we bankroll for a rainy day?"

Welch said climate change, behavioural changes in adult salmon, the debate over fish farms and changing ocean conditions all need to be addressed to find a solution.

Hearings are planned for 10 communities along the Fraser River and along the sockeye's migratory route, including Nanaimo, which will host a public forum on Sept. 14 from 1:30-4:30 p.m. at the Coast Bastion Inn.

The commission has identified five questions it is seeking input on:

- u What is your vision for the sustainability of Fraser River sockeye?
- u What is required to secure the future of Fraser sockeye?;
- u What are the major habitat issues for Fraser sockeye and how can these be mitigated?
- u How can Fraser sockeye be effectively harvested?
- u How can citizens participate in the recovery of Fraser sockeye?

Anyone interested in making a presentation to the commission must apply through the website at [www.cohencommission.ca](http://www.cohencommission.ca).

The commission will also address other topics the public believes is relevant to the inquiry. Based on its findings, the commission will make recommendations for improving the future sustainability of the sockeye salmon fishery in the Fraser River, including any changes to policies, practices and procedures of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

A forum will also be held in Victoria Sept. 16 from 6:30-9:30 p.m. at the Hotel Grand Pacific, 463 Belleville St.

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