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Lone fisherman nets \$419,000 grant

By **JEREMY LOOME**, LEGISLATURE BUREAU

A \$419,000 bailout grant to a single commercial fisherman shows the provincial government mismanaged the industry and is "papering over its mistakes with money," a Liberal MLA said yesterday.

The government paid commercial fisherman Curtis Larsen the money last year, according to the "Blue Book" of government spending released this week.

According to David Ealey, with Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, the money was part of a bailout for the industry, which was being forced off of various lakes by the government to protect fish stocks and to ensure the viability of the more lucrative sport fishing industry.

When asked why the government didn't simply shut down fishing on the lakes where fish populations were at risk, Ealey said that not only would've been unfair to non-net-using sport fishermen - who can be species-specific in using catch-and-release - but also doesn't recognize that "it was felt that the government encouraged the growth of the commercial fishery."

That's code for: "We encouraged people to overfish," said NDP Leader Brian Mason.

"I have sympathy for commercial fishermen who were enticed into the industry because of the government's haywire, unsustainable programs, but I think that the government has a real problem: every time they screw up, which is often, they use taxpayers' money to buy their way out. It just really smacks of economic mismanagement, which is the real legacy of the Conservative government."