

February 13, 2024

The Hon. Pablo Rodriguez, Minister of Transport, Canada pablo.rodriguez@parl.gc.ca

The Hon. Nathan Cullen, Minister of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship, B.C.

WLR.Minister@gov.bc.ca

Dear Mr. Rodriguez and Mr. Cullen:

Chambers of Commerce throughout the Thompson Okanagan today express concern around the threat of invasive mussels to our freshwater lakes and river system in British Columbia. Together, we call for an immediate temporary moratorium on out-of-province watercraft to prevent the introduction of invasive mussels into B.C. In doing so, we join the Okanagan Basin Water Board and some of our tourism associations.

We have learned that the federal government may be cutting funds to the mussel inspection program in B.C. Invasive mussels were verified in 2023 in Idaho, an 11-hour drive from B.C.'s borders. While B.C. provincial staff and Conservation Officers do good work through the Invasive Mussel Defence Program (IMDP), serious gaps remain. Only a complete moratorium prior to establishing and maintaining round-the-clock monitoring will protect the fresh waters of our still mussel-free province from this invasive scourge.

The IMDP budget has been severely cut in recent years, representing a significant risk to much of the province, including the Thompson Okanagan.

Between May and December 2023, the IMDP intercepted 155 watercraft entering B.C. that were identified as high-risk for the mussels; 14 were confirmed to be carrying the mussels. At least a third of these were heading to the Okanagan-Thompson-Nicola.

We support the OBWB's following four requested actions to be taken by the Province of B.C.:

1. Introduce a temporary moratorium on out-of-province watercraft entering B.C.
2. Introduce "pull-the-plug" (on bilgewater) legislation to be in effect prior to the 2024 boating season
3. Ask Canada's Minister for Public Safety to issue direction for all watercraft entering Canada at all border crossings to be inspected prior to allowing entry.
4. Commit funding to the Invasive Mussel Defence Program of no less than \$4 million per year

We further support four "fill the gaps" actions to follow those above:

1. Enhance funding to recruit and retain Invasive Mussel Defence Program staff to 2019 levels
2. Update the provincial Early Detection, Rapid Response plan





Growing the people who power the Okanagan.

3. Lead a planning process to create long-term response, containment, and control
4. Promote vulnerability assessments by utilities, local jurisdictions, and private entities

B.C.'s IMDP is currently under the jurisdiction of the B.C. Minister of Water, Land, and Resource Stewardship.

The stunning natural beauty of Okanagan Lake provides a visual pleasure for the senses and a source of water to surrounding populations. Multiple freshwater bodies of water throughout the Thompson Okanagan from the border to the Shuswap require the protection of elected officials and residents. This is our obligation to the future.

We call on you both to take immediate action on the requests we are making today.

Dan Price, Chair
Kelowna Chamber of Commerce

Curtis Urlacher, President
Peachland Chamber of Commerce

Bryan Fitzpatrick, President
Greater Westside Board of Trade

Cathy Piva, President
Kamloops & District Chamber of Commerce

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