

February 2, 2018

## NEWS RELEASE

# OKANAGAN WATER BOARD URGES OTTAWA FOR COMMITMENT ON MUSSEL PREVENTION

**Kelowna, B.C.** – After returning hopeful from a June 2017 meeting in Ottawa regarding invasive mussel prevention, the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) is tired of waiting for a response. This week, eight months after that meeting and with another boating season around the corner, the board sent a follow-up letter on the “urgent need for federal action.”

“We are disheartened that the federal government hasn’t made this a priority in our area. We have had no follow up communication, or commitment, on how they would contain the mussels in regions already infested and prevent them from spreading to Western Canada,” said OBWB Chair Tracy Gray.

In June, Gray was joined by a number of fellow Water Board directors for a meeting with Burnaby North-Seymour MP Terry Beech who is also Parliamentary Secretary to the Min. of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO), Nicholas Winfield – Director General Ecosystems Management for DFO, Ashraf Amlani – DFO Special Assistant for the Pacific - West Coast, and Kelowna-Lake Country MP Stephen Fuhr. At the time, it was noted that \$43.8 million was allocated to address aquatic invasive species in Canada over five years (2017-18 fiscal year to 2021-22 fiscal year). The OBWB contingent made the case for some of it to go to invasive mussel action.

A 2013 [study](#) for the Water Board estimated that the economic impact of invasive zebra or quagga mussels to could be at least \$42 million each year in lost revenue, added maintenance of aquatic infrastructure and irreparable ecological damage in the Okanagan. A similar study found it would cost the Pacific Northwest [\\$500 million annually](#). In the Great Lakes, where the mussels gained a foothold in the 1980s, the annual cost to control zebra mussels in water intakes alone is \$250 million.

“We know from that June meeting that there is federal funding for aquatic invasive species and expect that some will go to protecting our region from invasive mussels. We also want to see funding and resources to develop a comprehensive federal strategy to protect our waters. That’s our goal,” Gray added.

“This is a non-partisan issue,” the chair noted. “All of our Okanagan Members of Parliament have expressed concern about protecting our watershed. We need to see serious action.”

This week’s follow-up letter was sent to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau – Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Youth, Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Ralph Goodale, Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard Dominic LeBlanc, and Minister of Environment and Climate Change Catherine McKenna.

Attached, please find the letter sent this week, as well as our original June 2017 federal Briefing Note.

Learn more about the mussels, the risks to the Okanagan, how to 'Have the Talk' with returning snowbirds and visitors to our region, as well as "Clean-Drain-Dry" and other prevention tips to protect our waters, at [www.DontMoveAMussel.ca](http://www.DontMoveAMussel.ca).

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**Rt. Hon. Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P.**  
Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Youth

**Hon. Ralph Goodale, P.C., M.P.**  
Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc, P.C., M.P.**  
Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard

**Hon. Catherine McKenna, P.C., M.P.**  
Minister of Environment and Climate Change

January 30, 2018

**Re: Urgent need for federal action to prevent invasive mussels from spreading within the Pacific Northwest**

Dear Prime Minister and Ministers,

We wish to again express our gratitude to Burnaby North – Seymour MP Terry Beech, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Kelowna - Lake Country MP Stephen Fuhr, Nicholas Winfield, Director General Ecosystem Management for DFO and Ashraf Amlani, DFO Special Assistant for the Pacific North Coast for meeting with our chair and board directors in June 2017 in Ottawa. We have attached our original briefing note from that meeting below.

We were also pleased that DFO staff participated in the Pacific NorthWest Economic Region (PNWER) Invasive Species Working Group in July 2017, to coordinate federal, provincial and international efforts to stop the spread of invasive mussels.

While we recognize your government's enhanced engagement on this issue, we remain concerned that another boating season has gone by and there have been no new steps federally, or by way of assistance to the provinces, to contain invasive mussels or to prevent the further spread of invasive mussels in Canada, specifically to Western Canada and our region in British Columbia. We note that the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans sent correspondence in October, 2017 to Okanagan MP's Mel Arnold and Dan Albas that "Budget 2017 provided \$43.8 million over five years to continue and expand programming for aquatic invasive species." We understand this funding is for the prevention of all aquatic invasive species, both in fresh water and marine environments, across Canada. Assuming that the money is distributed evenly, only \$1.46 million per region, per year, was allocated in Budget 2017. For context, the Province of B.C., with partner funding from power companies and the Columbia Basin Trust spent \$4.45 million in 2017 for invasive mussel prevention alone, and much more protection is needed to avert a very costly infestation.

**We ask how this \$43.8 million is being distributed to contain or prevent the spread of invasive mussels, what occurred in 2017, and what the plans are for 2018-2021. Is the distribution occurring by region, or by invasive species type and who is overseeing this?**

In other correspondence from the federal Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness to MPs Mel Arnold and Dan Albas, we note that "CBSA is co-operating with BC Ministry of Environment

conservation officers and has allowed temporary inspection and education stations to be set up near land border ports of entry in the Okanagan and Kootenay District.” This effort should be extended across western Canada so CBSA officers at all land ports of entry are starting the inspection process, identifying high-risk watercraft and ensuring that none of these enter Canadian waters without an appropriate inspection, decontamination and quarantine if necessary. More training for CBSA officers is needed, and watercraft inspections should be a mandatory function, rather than a discretionary function in all cases. As stated in earlier correspondence and at our June meeting with you, the threats and costs are too high. According to PNWER, the economic impact would be \$500 million annually to the Pacific Northwest. Statistics should also be gathered regarding origin and destination of watercraft, and how many are considered high-risk. This information gathering will help inform management decisions in the future.

**We ask that you work with the provinces to amend regulations to help prevent the further spread of Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS).** One example is changing the air transport regulations with regard to aquatic aircraft, such as float planes and water bombers to prevent the spread of AIS from one water body to another. Another is the regulatory approval of substances which could aid in a rapid response to control or eradicate invasive species. We also ask for the inclusion of AIS and Clean, Drain, Dry awareness in the education and testing requirements to obtain a Pleasure Craft Operator’s Card.

**We also respectfully request an update on the following recommendations from our June 2017 meeting:**

1. Minister to allocate targeted funding to match provincial spending toward improved invasive mussel education, containment and prevention regimes for summer 2017 – now summer 2018.
2. Minister to meet with Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) as soon as possible to enhance the protection of federally-controlled lands, waterways, and ports of entry (border crossings) by developing a joint work plan and actions to ensure enforcement of the *Aquatic Invasive Species Regulations* by both DFO fisheries officers and CBSA agents through the use of mandatory watercraft inspections.
3. To confirm ongoing participation in the Pacific NorthWest Economic Region (PNWER) Invasive Species Working Group to coordinate federal, provincial and international efforts to stop the spread of invasive mussels.

We look forward to your response, helping prevent the costly spread of invasive mussels into Western provinces and the Okanagan.

Yours sincerely,



Tracy Gray, Chair  
Okanagan Basin Water Board

CC:

- Okanagan MPs: Stephen Fuhr, Dan Albas, Mel Arnold, Richard Cannings;
- Federal Critics: Pierre Paul-Hus; Todd Doherty, Hon Ed Fast;
- Okanagan MLAs: Steve Thomson, Norm Letnick, Eric Foster, Dan Ashton, Linda Larson, Jackie Tegart, Greg Kylo;
- Regional District Chairs for North Okanagan, Central Okanagan, and Okanagan-Similkameen;



- Okanagan Municipalities;
- Chiefs Executive Council, Okanagan Nation Alliance;
- Matt Morrison, Chief Executive Officer, Pacific NorthWest Economic Region;
- Gail Wallin, Executive Director, Invasive Species Council of B.C.

BRIEFING NOTE FOR MINISTER OF FISHERIES AND OCEANS AND THE CANADIAN COAST GUARD

**MEETING WITH THE OKANAGAN BASIN WATER BOARD (OBWB) REGARDING PREVENTION OF INVASIVE MUSSEL INTRODUCTIONS TO UNINFESTED REGIONS IN CANADA**

Decision Sought

SUMMARY

- Meeting with OBWB Chair Tracy Gray (Councillor City of Kelowna, Director Regional District of Central Okanagan), Vice-Chair Juliette Cunningham (Councillor City of Vernon, Director Regional District of North Okanagan), Director (Past Chair) Doug Findlater (Mayor City of West Kelowna, Director Regional District of Central Okanagan), Director Peter Waterman (Mayor District of Summerland, Director Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen) (Annex A has background on the Water Board), June 1, 2017.
- The purpose of this meeting is to discuss increased federal action to prevent the spread of invasive zebra and quagga mussels into Western Canada, B.C. and the Okanagan specifically (refer to Annex B for a map of current invasive mussel distribution).
- Recent mussel invasions into Montana (October 2016) make this an urgent matter that must be addressed prior to and during this boating season (May-October 2017). The OBWB recommends that the Minister provide funding to improve communications, strengthen protections, and direct his staff to engage in the Pacific NorthWest Economic Region (PNWER) Invasive Species Working Group.

**BACKGROUND**

Invasive zebra and quagga mussels, first introduced to the Great Lakes in the 1980's substantially alter aquatic food webs. Invasive mussels have recently been detected in water bodies in Montana (October 2016), and in Manitoba (including Lake Winnipeg in 2013 and Cedar Lake in 2016) (see Annex B for current distribution).

Current federal regulations (*Aquatic Invasive Species Regulation, 2015*) prohibit the importation, possession, transportation and release of these mussels in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

**CONSIDERATIONS**

Mussel infestations negatively affect municipal water, hydropower, and agriculture irrigation systems by clogging water intake and distribution pipes; negatively impact tourism and recreation; foul bridges and boats; increase volumes of aquatic weeds along lake shorelines and create toxic algae blooms, putting drinking water at risk. As noted above, mussel infestations also substantially alter the aquatic ecosystem and aquatic food webs. These mussels have also been identified as a threat to B.C.'s endangered Rocky Mountain Ridged Mussel by Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (2010).

The economic impact of invasive mussels to municipal, hydroelectric, industrial and agricultural facilities, fisheries (commercial, recreational and Indigenous), tourism and property values has been estimated to be at least \$42 million per year in the Okanagan alone, and \$500 million annually in the Pacific Northwest. The annual cost on the Great Lakes to control zebra mussels in water intakes alone is \$250 million.

Western provinces have allocated funding and resources to prevent the spread of invasive mussels through watercraft inspection, water sampling, emergency response plans and public education. Current provincial programs for preventing the spread of invasive mussels have seen significant improvements in the last few years. The last significant action by the federal government was the 2015 change to the *Aquatic Invasive Species Regulation*, and the recent Parks Canada ban of motorized watercraft from entering Waterton Lakes National Park to address the spread of invasive mussels from Montana (for more Background see Annex A).



The 2017-18 Departmental Plan for Fisheries and Oceans Canada states that “Efforts will continue on a national approach to prevent the introduction and spread of aquatic invasive species in Canada, which will help protect ecosystems and fish stocks.” Further, it says “Sustainability and ongoing productivity of commercial, recreational and Aboriginal fisheries is best achieved when partners and stakeholders with a common interest work together to conserve and protect fish and fish habitat.”

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Minister to allocate targeted funding to match provincial spending toward improved invasive mussel education, containment and prevention regimes for summer 2017.
2. Minister to meet with Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) as soon as possible to enhance the protection of federally-controlled lands, waterways, and ports of entry (border crossings) by developing a joint work plan and actions to ensure enforcement of the *Aquatic Invasive Species Regulations* by both DFO fisheries officers and CBSA agents through the use of mandatory watercraft inspections.
3. Minister to appoint senior Department staff to participate in the Pacific NorthWest Economic Region (PNWER) Invasive Species Working Group to coordinate federal, provincial and international efforts to stop the spread of invasive mussels.
4. OBWB requests a response letter as soon as possible that outlines the Minister’s decision and actions on the recommendations to prevent the further spread of invasive mussels in Canada.

## Annex A

### **OKANAGAN BASIN WATER BOARD**

The Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) is a unique local government agency in the central interior of B.C., located on the trans-boundary waters of the Okanagan River, which feeds into the Columbia River. The Okanagan watershed is almost 200 km in length, covering 8,000 km<sup>2</sup> in area and over 40,000 ha of lake surface area. The OBWB serves three regional districts, 11 municipalities, and five of the member bands of the Okanagan Nation. The Okanagan Valley is home to more than 340,000 residents and the fastest growing metropolitan area in B.C.

The OBWB's mission is to provide leadership to protect and enhance quality of life in the Okanagan Basin through sustainable water management. Part of our mandate is to define water problems and priorities, the economic feasibility of solutions, responsibility, necessary legislation and required action.

Since 2012, the OBWB has been a vocal advocate of enhancing invasive mussel prevention, as the Okanagan is at very high risk for invasion based on water chemistry, temperature and other conditions. The Okanagan River is the most productive Sockeye salmon spawning habitat in the Columbia system, accounting for 80% of the total population. The Okanagan River is the focus of major restoration and fisheries improvement work by the Okanagan Nation Alliance, to which the species is of critical importance for cultural, food and spiritual purposes.

In December 2016, the OBWB called for action from several federal government ministries to increase training and funding for Canada Border Services Agency, increase funding for containment to provinces that are already mussel-infested (Quebec, Ontario and Manitoba), increase funding to mussel-free provinces for prevention, and for a commitment to research and education for prevention, containment, control and eradication methods. We also asked that senior public servants in several ministries be assigned to participate in forums such as the Pacific NorthWest Economic Region's Invasive Species Working Group to demonstrate that the federal government takes this issue seriously.

The OBWB also has a 40 year history of controlling invasive milfoil in the valley, at a direct cost to residents of over \$650,000 annually. The cost of managing our infrastructure, losses in the tourism and agriculture industries, and ecological losses from an infestation of mussels would be disastrous.



Annex B

**CURRENT INVASIVE MUSSEL DISTRIBUTION IN NORTH AMERICA**

