

New measures now proposed to fight aquatic invasive species

By **RON CANNAN**
Special to The Daily Courier

Several constituents, led by the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB)'s "Don't Move a Mussel" campaign, have written to me asking the federal government to move forward with the provinces and territories to ensure our lakes and waterways are protected from aquatic invasive species (AIS).

On Dec. 5, I was pleased to join a roundtable discussion with MP Dan Albas and other stakeholders, including Tourism Kelowna, at the Kelowna Yacht Club to report that our government, under Fisheries and Oceans Minister Gail Shea, has taken new proposed regulations in place to fight against aquatic invasive species.

The proposed regulations are a result of close consultation with provincial and territorial governments.

As required, on Dec. 6, the proposed AIS regulations were published in the Canada Gazette, Part 1, to allow for a 30-day public comment period. More information can be found at www.gazette.gc.ca under the Dec. 6 edition.

The Government of Canada takes the issue of aquatic invasive species very seriously and is committed to preventing the introduction, spread and establishment of AIS in Canadian waters.

The federal government invests over \$14 million annually to address the issue of aquatic invasive species, thereby fostering healthy, safe and sustainable Canadian waters.

If allowed to become established in ecosystems, aquatic invasive species such as the zebra mussel can significantly harm water and habitats, introduce disease, affect fisheries, reduce biodiversity and even lead to the extinction of indigenous fish species.

Given that Canada has 20 per cent of the world's fresh water, and the longest coastline, this places us at high risk from AIS.

The proposed regulations address gaps in the current Canadian regulatory framework by providing a comprehensive set of provisions and authorities that would improve the ability to prevent the intentional or unintentional introduction, respond to invasions and manage the spread of AIS, while protecting Canada's aquatic ecosystems and biodiversity.

This will help prevent incurring costs associated with the establishment of invasive species, including impacts on fishing and aquaculture activities, recreation and tourism-related activities, and infrastructure.

These new regulatory provisions would also address enforcement. Current regulations can be enforced by provincial enforcement officers, but now Canadian Border Services Agency officers will also have the ability to enforce prohibitions against import at the Canadian border, such as ordering a vessel back to a U.S. washing station before allowing it to enter Canada.

Finally, the federal minister of fisheries and oceans and designated provincial ministers would be provided with the ability to license fishing to help control and manage the spread of aquatic invasive species, as well as authorize or direct the use of approved deleterious substances to control or eradicate aquatic invasive species.

Aquatic invasive species pose a significant and growing threat to British Columbia, and that is why it is so important that we work towards a co-ordinated and comprehensive approach that will safeguard our lakes, rivers and coastal waters, including Okanagan Lake. Anna Sears, executive director of the OBWB, has already publicly stated that the proposed rules appear to be just what the OBWB is looking for.

Nancy Cameron of the Kelowna Chamber of Commerce has also shared her enthusiastic support.

If you have any comments, I encourage you to participate in the 30-day consultation and look forward to the proposed regulations being put in place.

As this will be my last column until the new year, I would like to wish all my constituents a Merry Christmas and the best of the holiday season. May you be blessed with a happy, healthy and prosperous 2015.

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EDITORIAL

Heavier traffic coming soon to Boucherie Road

In a few days, many thousands of Westsiders are going to realize they essentially have another way to get into Kelowna. That realization promises to make life unpleasant for people living along Boucherie Road, which could become a preferred short-cut to motorists trying to avoid traffic jams on Highway 97.

West Kelowna officials should prepare to be bombarded by people calling for speed-reduction measures on Boucherie Road. There will probably be demands for traffic lights, speed limit reductions, and greater police enforcement measures to prevent Boucherie from turning into a full-fledged highway bypass.

It's unfortunate the District of West Kelowna will have to deal with the situation, because it is not of their making. A \$9.3 million road project that's nearly completed will benefit primarily the Westbank First Nation and the tenants of the Okanagan Lake shopping centre on band land at the

corner of Highway 97 and Westside Road.

When it's finished — completion was supposed to be at the end of November — drivers will be able to get from Boucherie Road right down to the W.R. Bennett Bridge access at Campbell Road, completely bypassing Highway 97.

The stretch of highway between Boucherie and the bridge is a common choke point during morning rush hours, and many drivers will welcome the chance to steer clear of it. The strip mall's tenants will welcome the new road link because it will provide easier and more direct access to their businesses for Lakeview Heights residents.

But homeowners on Tomat Avenue surely cannot be looking forward to the opening of the new road, because it will bring much more traffic to the first stretch of their dead-end road.

The new road represents another part of the provincial government's commitments to the WFN, made in

connection with plans for the new bridge, which opened in 2008. There's now quite a collection of interchanges, tunnels, and secondary access roads around the top of bridge hill, the purpose of which seems mystifying, at least in the short-term.

However, as the band land develops, the value of all the new road infrastructure should become apparent. Meanwhile, the District of West Kelowna campaigned for a long time just to get the ministry of transportation to add left-turn arrows on portions of the highway within the municipality.

West Kelowna has long-range plans to enhance the appeal of Boucherie Road as a scenic wine route, with narrower traffic lanes, lower speed limits, sidewalks, and ornamental lighting.

The municipality might want to accelerate those plans, before Boucherie evolves on its own into little more than a highway bypass.

— Reporter Ron Seymour



What are chiefs afraid of?

By **RAVINA BAINS**
Special to The Daily Courier

In a letter to Richard Price in 1789, Thomas Jefferson wrote "whenever the people are well informed, they can be trusted with their own government; that whenever things get so far wrong as to attract their notice, they may be relied on to set them to rights." In other words, an informed electorate possesses the knowledge to hold their government accountable.

Jefferson understood how citizens and power interact. As do Canadian First Nations members such as Phyllis Sutherland, who supports the First Nations Transparency Act. Sutherland, from Peguis First Nation in Manitoba, argues that the First Nations Transparency Act allows "people at the grassroots level... to access information about their community without fear of intimidation or reprisal." The act requires chiefs to publicly release the band's audited financial statements as well as chief and councillors salaries, informing First Nations members how their band finances are managed and informing Canadian taxpayers how their tax dollars are being spent.

Some have argued that the First Nations Transparency Act requires the disclosure of sensitive information. However, it merely extends to First Nations politicians what is required of all other levels of government and politicians in Canada:

the disclosure of salaries and financial statements. For example, the Manitoba Municipal Act requires the financial statements of municipalities to show "the amount of compensation, expenses and any other payment made to each person who is a member of the council."

The importance of this disclosure may be lost on those who do not live on a reserve. But, as aboriginal author Calvin Heil states, "community members... have no practical ability to pursue the kinds of information related to transparency and accountability that all other Canadians take for granted." The First Nations Transparency Act attempts to provide an avenue for First Nations members to obtain this basic financial information.

So does such disclosure have a real-world impact in First Nations communities? Members of the Shuswap First Nation in British Columbia think so. They recently decided to not re-elect their chief of over 30 years after audited statements, now public, showed excessive spending, unexplained expenses and a chief's salary in excess of \$90,000 a year. Elsewhere, in Opaskwayak Cree Nation in Manitoba, band members want answers and change after audited statements showed a net increase in debt to \$8.2 million from \$5 million within one year, all under the leadership of their chief, who is the highest paid chief in Manitoba at \$130,000 a year.

With an increase in federal transfers to First Nations communities, this type of

transparency and accountability is needed now more than ever. The federal government alone spends more than \$10 billion annually on aboriginal issues, and spending per First Nations person in Canada rose more than 800 per cent over the past 60 years. In comparison, spending per person on all Canadians rose by 387 per cent.

Most First Nations governments are not akin to Shuswap and most have also complied with the new legislation: 538 out of 582 First Nations have publicly released their salaries and audited financial statements. As for the remaining 44, they will now have funding for non-essential services (such as chief and councillor salaries worth over \$24 million) withheld by the federal government.

It is unclear why the chiefs of these 44 communities are choosing to withhold this information from their electorate and Canadian taxpayers. It is particularly peculiar that two of these communities, Weenusk First Nation and Wuskwil Sipihk First Nation, previously published their audited financial statements and have now reversed course. That begs the question: why are these 44 chiefs afraid of an informed electorate?

Perhaps because Jefferson — and Phyllis Sutherland — were right about the power of voters to set matters right once informed about the facts.

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— Troy Media