

April 8, 2022

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

OKANAGAN WATER BOARD LOOKS TO FEDS TO STOP INVASIVE MUSSELS' WESTWARD ADVANCE

Kelowna, B.C. – With a new federal fisheries minister from B.C. and some recent positive steps forward in addressing zebra and quagga mussels, the Okanagan Basin Water Board is once again urging the federal government to push on and help prevent the westward spread of invasive mussels. This, especially as the weather warms and the Okanagan prepares for another busy tourist season on valley lakes.

This week, the OBWB sent a letter to Joyce Murray, Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard. The letter calls for a renewal of multi-year federal funding, which is due to expire in 2023, for invasive mussel outreach and education and lake monitoring.

“We’re happy to see a fisheries minister appointed from B.C. and hope she has a good understanding of water issues in the Okanagan and around the province,” said Sue McKortoff, Chair of the Water Board (OBWB). Reviewing B.C. inspection stats from last year, McKortoff insists that invasive mussel prevention requires federal support.

The mussels are currently in Quebec, Ontario and Manitoba, and there have been several close calls with mussel-infested watercraft being intercepted coming into B.C., Alberta and Saskatchewan. Last year alone, B.C.’s inspection stations intercepted 17 mussel-fouled watercraft, eight of which were headed to the Okanagan. Of these 17, the greatest number – seven – came from Ontario, two came from Manitoba and 1 from Quebec, the other seven came from various U.S. states.

“The OBWB, through its Okanagan WaterWise program, has been delivering the [‘Don’t Move A Mussel’](#) program since 2013. We have also been funding the Okanagan and Similkameen Invasive Species Society (OASISS) to extend this outreach. As a result, awareness in the Okanagan regarding these mussels is very high, but we have no authority outside our region, so provincial and federal support is absolutely necessary,” McKortoff added.

In its letter, the OBWB acknowledges DFO efforts to work with the Province of Manitoba to contain the mussels and work with Canada Border Services Agency to improve enforcement of Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) regulations at international borders. But it also notes correspondence from DFO that states provinces may authorize the release of deleterious substances (i.e. pesticides) to prevent, control or eradicate AIS. “While this is an important tool for provincial governments to have in limited cases, it is not an effective tool to address invasive mussels in larger waterbodies which are hydrologically connected to large river systems – like we have in the Okanagan,” the letter states. In addition, the letter notes, Okanagan lakes are a source of drinking water and past experience with chemical treatment of invasive milfoil in the 1970s has shown “there is no social licence for this method in our local communities.”

“This is not a practical solution for the Okanagan and most other regions of B.C.,” added McKortoff, noting that prevention is Western Canada’s best defense. “We recognize that we each have a role in keeping zebra and quagga mussels out – as individuals, as local and regional areas, but that we need provincial and federal government support. That’s the only way we will be able to keep our waters safe.”

A 2013 OBWB study found the cost of an infestation to the Okanagan would be at least \$42 mill. annually to manage, recognizing the impact on fisheries, tourism, aquatic infrastructure, and more. In response, the OBWB-OkWaterWise launched its Don't Move A Mussel (DMM) campaign, valued between 2013 and 2021 at more than \$996,000. It has also provided another \$266,000 over that time to OASISS to extend the reach of DMM, conduct direct boater outreach and more.

Please find attached, the OBWB's letter to the federal government.

For more information on zebra and quagga mussels, the risks to the Okanagan, and how to prevent their spread, please visit www.DontMoveAMussel.ca.

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Hon. Joyce Murray
Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard
Minister's Office
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April 7, 2022

Re: Calls to Action for Invasive Mussel Prevention in B.C.

Dear Minister Murray,

Congratulations on your appointment as Minister of Fisheries, Oceans, and the Canadian Coast Guard. The Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) is a unique local government watershed agency, established under provincial legislation in 1970 with a mandate to identify and resolve critical water issues in the Okanagan valley. Since 2012, the OBWB has taken an active role in advocating for the prevention of invasive mussels into B.C. waters.

Today we are calling again for stronger action to prevent an introduction of invasive mussels into B.C. waters. Specifically, we request that Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) renew its multi-year funding for outreach and education, and invasive mussel lake monitoring, which was previously provided through the Canada Nature Fund for Aquatic Species at Risk.

We recently reviewed correspondence from DFO to North Okanagan – Shuswap MP Mel Arnold, a member of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans. The OBWB was very pleased to learn that the Province of Manitoba, supported by DFO, has a program to contain invasive mussels in contaminated waterbodies. This is a positive step forward, necessary for enforcing federal Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) regulations. We are also pleased that DFO is working with Canada Border Services Agency to improve enforcement of AIS regulations at international borders – a long-time call to action by the OBWB. We understand that individual border crossings have had inconsistent enforcement in the past and we hope that this new direction will help address this issue. We understand that new protocols, tools and procedures have been developed to assist CBSA enforce AIS regulations. We would appreciate more information on this to better understand this new process.

We also recognize the education and outreach support, both through funding and the development of brand toolkits and messaging. However, the most effective partners in this effort are the local and regional invasive species groups, such as the Okanagan and Similkameen Invasive Species Society (OASISS) and the Columbia Shuswap Invasive Species Society, who conduct direct public outreach to watercraft owners and provide ongoing mussel monitoring in local lakes. This work has been partially funded through the Canada Nature Fund for Aquatic Species at Risk, but that funding is set to expire in March 2023. As noted above, we urge you to renew that funding with a multi-year commitment to support this essential ongoing work.

We would also like to learn more about the project you referenced in your response to MP Arnold, indicating a \$700,000 commitment since 2019 in B.C. to focus on “increasing awareness and identifying best practices to reduce AIS-related threats to species at risk.” Specifically, we ask for details about the project name, scope, funded organization and outcomes, and any other relevant information that would help us better understand this action.

DFO correspondence, both to MP Arnold, and in the past to OBWB, has referred to “prescribed persons” who may authorize the release of deleterious substances to prevent, control or eradicate AIS. While this is an important tool for provincial governments to have in limited cases, it is not an effective tool to address invasive mussels in larger waterbodies which are hydrologically connected to large river systems – like we have in the Okanagan, and in the Shuswap. The case study of Lake Winnipeg shows that by the time adult mussels are detectable, eradication is nearly impossible. Further, Okanagan lakes – at high risk due to high calcium levels, warm temperatures and extensive water recreation use – are also sources of our drinking water. We have learned from past efforts to manage invasive species using chemicals that there is no social licence for this method in our local communities. We have serious concerns that DFO continues to cite this in its communications as a positive response and effective tool. It would have extremely limited application, and limited benefit, for our local water bodies.

A 2013 OBWB study found the cost of an infestation to our region would be at least \$42 mill. annually to manage. As such, we remain committed to protecting B.C. waters and supporting provincial and federal efforts. This commitment has included delivery of our [“Don’t Move A Mussel”](#) campaign, promoting the clean, drain, dry message, and valued at more than \$996,000 to date, and another \$266,000 in funding provided to OASISS to conduct direct boater outreach and more.

We look forward to hearing from you, and supporting the enhanced efforts noted above to keep B.C. waters free from invasive mussels.

Sincerely,



Sue McKortoff, Chair
Okanagan Basin Water Board

CC:

- Okanagan MPs: Mel Arnold, Tracy Gray, Dan Albas, Richard Cannings
- B.C. Minister of Environment and Climate Change Strategy Hon. George Heyman
- B.C. Minister of Land, Water and Resource Stewardship Hon. Josie Osborne
- Okanagan MLAs: Harwinder Sandhu, Norm Letnick, Renee Merrifield, Ben Stewart, Dan Ashton, Roly Russell
- Okanagan Nation Alliance, Chiefs Executive Council
- Okanagan Local Government Chairs and Mayors
- Okanagan Chambers of Commerce
- Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association
- Pacific NorthWest Economic Region
- Union of BC Municipalities
- Invasive Species Council of B.C.
- Okanagan and Similkameen Invasive Species Society, Columbia-Shuswap Invasive Species Society
- Shuswap Watershed Council