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Thompson-Okanagan Chambers want a halt on out-of-province boats entering BC

Chambers of Commerce and Boards of Trade throughout the Thompson-Okanagan are calling on more action to protect the region from invasive mussels.

The [Kelowna](#) Chamber is leading the charge that centres around a call for the Province to implement an immediate temporary moratorium on out-of-province boats entering British Columbia.

The group sent a letter to Pablo Rodriguez, Canada's Minister of Transport, and Nathan Cullen, Canada's Minister of Water, Land and Resources, on Tuesday.

"We have learned that the federal government may be cutting funds to the mussel inspection program in BC. Invasive mussels were verified in 2023 in Idaho, an 11-hour drive from BC's borders," the letter reads.

"While BC 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."



Photo Credit: Okanagan Basin Water Board

The discovery of invasive mussels in Idaho raised alarms over the threat posed to BC waters and tourism, and the Chambers want the moratorium in place until the results of water treatment in Idaho are assessed.

"Tourists and locals love our beaches and our lakes," noted Nicole Clark, president of the Penticton and Wine Country Chamber. "We can't stand by and lose these irreplaceable resources."

According to the Chambers, the budget cuts to the IMDP in recent years represents a significant risk to much of the province, including the Thompson Okanagan.

Between May and December last year, the IMDP intercepted 155 watercraft entering BC that were identified as high-risk for mussels and 14 were confirmed to be carrying mussels.

Along with the moratorium on out-of-province boats entering BC, the Chambers are also supporting the Okanagan Basin Water Board's (OBWB) three other calls to action for the Province.

Those are:

- Introduce "pull-the-plug" (on bilgewater) legislation to be in effect prior to the 2024 boating season.
- 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.
- Commit funding to the Invasive Mussel Defence Program of no less than \$4 million per year.

"We are thankful for the support of Thompson-Okanagan chambers, and the many other voices that have joined us, in our call to the federal and BC governments to commit to funding and legislation that will properly protect BC from invasive mussels," said OBWB Chair Blair Ireland.

"We've been calling for stronger support for more than a decade, recognizing the gaps in current prevention efforts. But now, with the threat closer than ever of an infestation reaching our shores, this issue has become critical."