

Honourable Nathan Cullen  
B.C. Minister of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship  
PO Box 9012 Stn Prov. Govt.  
Victoria, BC V8M 9L6

August 28, 2024

Honorable Grant Hunter  
Chair, Alberta Aquatic Invasive Species Task Force  
513-F Legislature Building  
10800 97<sup>th</sup> Ave.  
Edmonton AB T5K 2B6

**Re: Inter-provincial cooperation to prevent invasive mussels**

Dear Minister Cullen and MLA Hunter,

On behalf of the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB), I am writing to thank you for your engagement with our staff at the recent Pacific NorthWest Economic Region (PNWER) summit in Whistler, B.C. in July. We believe PNWER is an excellent forum to engage on aquatic invasive species prevention and to discuss inter-jurisdictional cooperation in greater detail. We ask that you continue the work started at PNWER by collaborating at the political level on several opportunities to strengthen the prevention of invasive mussels into Western Canada.

**Call for federal action**

We ask that both provinces call on the federal government to provide resources for provincial invasive mussel programs, including direct federal funding to watercraft inspection programs. Federal funding for invasive mussels has largely been limited to detection, rather than prevention. As we know from Lake Winnipeg and countless other lakes, once a detection occurs, it is already too late.

As shown in the attached recent correspondence from Hon. Diane LeBouthillier, Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, although the federal government recognizes that “effective management of aquatic invasive species is a shared priority and responsibility,” provinces are left to lead these management efforts within their boundaries. This apparent federal abdication of responsibility has helped invasive mussels continue their spread west. The spread has led to closed lakes in national parks, increased cost to drinking water and hydropower facilities, reduced commercial and recreational fisheries, and harmed water quality and quality of life for residents in affected watersheds. The federal government must do more to prevent, not just monitor, the spread of invasive mussels.

**Create “Western Canada Invasive Mussel-Free Zone”**

We also ask you to consider the development of a “Western Canada Invasive Mussel-Free Zone” including B.C., Alberta, and potentially Saskatchewan. Participating provinces could act together to make inspections mandatory for all watercraft entering the zone, creating common policy and penalties between provinces. Further, private industries like marinas and environmental firms inside the zone could be certified to provide approved inspections when watercraft are not stopped at provincially run seasonal stations. This approach would not increase provincial enforcement costs but would provide a second layer of inspections that would

make mandatory inspections more achievable. Industry partners could charge a fee for this service and make it available year-round. A similar model is used in Arizona.

As an alternative to mandatory inspections, provinces in the Western Canada Invasive Mussel-Free Zone could work together to ban watercraft from outside the zone. While there may be effects on tourism, it could mean less restrictive travel within the zone, and support for industries such as watercraft rentals and local watercraft sales. Rules for mandatory inspections would remain in place for anyone travelling with watercraft out of the zone and then returning.

#### **Align penalties and fines across provinces**

Finally, we ask that the provinces work together to have consistent policies, fines and penalties whenever possible across Western Canada. Alberta has demonstrated a commitment to enhancing these efforts, recently introducing the highest fines in North America with the fine for failing to stop at an inspection station at \$4,200 and failure to pull the drain plug at \$600. We urge B.C. to match these levels. Large powered watercraft represent the highest risk of transporting invasive mussels, and those who can afford to own these craft and transport them between provinces may not be deterred by a fine of a few hundred dollars – less than a tank of fuel for their boat.

#### **Public support**

In March, OBWB convened the Okanagan-Interior Invasive Mussel Working Group, attended by more than 100 people representing 58 local governments, First Nations, marinas and yacht clubs, businesses, tourism associations, chambers of commerce, invasive species and conservation groups and other organizations. This level of participation shows the seriousness of the issue, and that as legislators, you have the public support and social capital to protect our western waters from this significant threat. OBWB will continue to provide advice and support within our mandate, and we look forward to increased collaboration and continued leadership from both your governments on this vital issue.

Sincerely,



Blair Ireland, Chair  
Okanagan Basin Water Board

CC:

- Okanagan MLAs: Harwinder Sandhu, Norm Letnick, Renee Merrifield, Ben Stewart, Dan Ashton, Roly Russell
- Okanagan Nation Alliance, Chiefs Executive Council and Natural Resources Council
- Okanagan Indian Band
- Westbank First Nation
- Penticton Indian Band
- Osoyoos Indian Band
- Lower Similkameen Indian Band



- Okanagan Local Government Chairs and Mayors
- Okanagan MPs: Mel Arnold, Tracy Gray, Dan Albas, Richard Cannings
- Pacific NorthWest Economic Region: Matt Morrison, Chief Executive Officer
- Invasive Species Council of B.C.: Gail Wallin, Executive Director
- Okanagan Chambers of Commerce
- Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association
- Union of BC Municipalities
- Shuswap Watershed Council
- Okanagan and Similkameen Invasive Species Society
- Okanagan-Interior Invasive Mussel Working Group members



August 9, 2024

Mr. Blair Ireland  
Chair  
Okanagan Basin Water Board  
c/o Ms. Corinne Jackson  
< [corinne.jackson@obwb.ca](mailto:corinne.jackson@obwb.ca) >

Dear Mr. Ireland,

I am writing in response to correspondence dated January 18, 2024, from Ms. Sue McKortoff, former chair of the Okanagan Basin Water Board, regarding the prevention of invasive zebra and quagga mussels from entering British Columbia (BC) waters.

Effective management of aquatic invasive species (AIS) is a shared priority and responsibility across federal, provincial, and territorial governments. The Province of British Columbia is the lead for the management of AIS within BC's freshwaters.

Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) agrees that prevention is key to addressing the threat of zebra and quagga mussels to BC. DFO and the Canada Border Services Agency work closely together to implement protocols, training, tools, and procedures for the enforcement of the *Aquatic Invasive Species Regulations* at international borders, including with respect to recreational watercraft entering Canada at land crossings (such as trailered boats), and illegal imports.

In May 2023, DFO announced that it was investing \$36.6 million over five years to fight AIS in Canada, including \$8.75 million in contribution funding for the newly created Aquatic Invasive Species Prevention Fund (AISPF). Thanks to these resources, DFO can undertake new activities focused on detecting and responding to reports of imminent invasions, including at international borders, and facilitating on-the-ground preventative action through partnerships. In addition, on February 14, 2024, I announced that DFO is funding through the AISPF, up to \$540,000 from 2023 to 2025 for the Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation, to add to the ongoing efforts to prevent the introduction of zebra and quagga mussels in BC.

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I have forwarded your correspondence to my Senior Regional Advisor for British Columbia, Mr. Joshua Lindner, who can be reached at < [joshua.lindner@dfo-mpo.gc.ca](mailto:joshua.lindner@dfo-mpo.gc.ca) >. Thank you for bringing the Okanagan Basin Water Board's concerns to DFO's attention.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Diane LeBouthillier', written in a cursive style.

The Honourable Diane LeBouthillier, P.C., M.P.

c.c.: The Honourable Dominic LeBlanc, P.C., K.C., M.P.  
Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions  
and Intergovernmental Affairs  
The Honourable Steven Guilbeault, P.C., M.P.  
Minister of Environment and Climate Change