

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson
Minister of Fisheries and Oceans Canada
min@dfo-mpo.gc.ca

Aug. 16, 2019

Re: Native mussel protection and invasive milfoil control in the Okanagan

Dear Minister Wilkinson

On behalf of the Greater Vernon Chamber of Commerce and its 500-plus members, I want to thank you for your recent announcement regarding the Rocky Mountain Ridged Mussel (RMRM) in Okanagan Valley lakes and responding to the concerns from communities within our region.

Deferring the potential reclassification of the mussel under the Species at Risk Act (SARA) will allow authorities to have a better understanding of its population and where it is located. However, additional steps must be taken. As part of the deferral, our Chamber urges Fisheries and Oceans Canada to endorse actions proposed by the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB).

Specifically, OBWB has requested that the two following items be addressed when considering the potential reclassification of RMRM:

- 1) A full public consultation process, with adequate notice and time to respond, on potentially listing the RMRM under the SARA, and public meetings to discuss the implications of the listing for Okanagan communities;
- 2) An economic analysis conducted by the federal government, looking at how the SARA listing (and thus prohibitions on rototilling milfoil) will affect milfoil weed growth, impacts on water quality, beach access, tourism and the Okanagan economy

As has been indicated in previous correspondence, our Chamber fully supports measures that protect native species, including the RMRM. However, we reiterate our concern that any regulations that prohibit rototilling of the invasive Eurasian milfoil could allow the weed to grow and negatively impact habitat for the mussels.

There is also the reality that OBWB's milfoil control program is essential from a social and economic perspective as the plant infests public beaches, boating areas and marinas. In 1991, a B.C. Ministry of Environment report indicated that terminating the milfoil control program would lead to an economic decline of \$85 million in tourism revenue, employment in tourism of 1,700 positions and real estate values of \$360 million. In Vernon, two of the community's primary beaches, as well as the marina, are partially or wholly prohibited from milfoil derooting due to RMRM. If the weed is permitted to flourish unchecked, there could be a significant economic cost.

It is because of these potential impacts that we strongly encourage comprehensive public consultation within the Okanagan Valley itself, while an economic analysis will provide much-

needed information on how a SARA designation could influence the spread of milfoil, water quality and the social and economic attributes that make the Okanagan unique in Canada.

In closing, our Chamber wants to thank you and your department for recognizing our concerns about the potential impact of a SARA designation on the overall health of the environment and the communities of the Okanagan.

Sincerely,



Dione Chambers, General Manager

Greater Vernon Chamber of Commerce

CC:

Okanagan Basin Water Board;

MP Mel Arnold;

MP Stephen Fuhr;

Minister Donaldson;

MLA Eric Foster;

City of Vernon;

District of Coldstream;

Regional District of North Okanagan;

Okanagan Indian Band;

BC Chamber of Commerce