

May 29, 2020

Hon. George Heyman

B.C. Minister of Environment and Climate Change
Strategy PO Box 9360 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria, B.C.

Re: Legislative Changes to Prevent Invasive Mussels

Dear Minister Heyman,

The Greater Vernon Chamber of Commerce endorses the Okanagan Basin Water Board's call for stronger provincial legislation to help prevent the introduction of invasive mussels in B.C., and particularly in Okanagan lakes.

As you are aware, the Covid-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the economy of communities across the province, with many businesses struggling to recover. The current situation would only be compounded if an infestation of invasive mussels occurred in the Okanagan, Shuswap or other regions.

Thousands of Okanagan residents depend on tourism, from hotels and motels, to attractions, retail sales and agri-tourism, and it's highly likely many visitors will stop coming to the Okanagan if they can't walk barefoot on the beach without injuring their feet. The Okanagan Basin Water Board estimates the annual loss to tourism revenue from invasive mussels could range from \$12 to \$22 million.

An infestation would also mean people living along the waterfront would experience a decrease in real estate values (about \$10 million a year) as their beaches would be rendered sterile. And higher taxes may be required as municipalities struggle to maintain water utilities with costly treatments to remove mussels from infrastructure.

While a watercraft inspection system exists within B.C., much more needs to be done to reduce the risk of invasive mussels entering the Okanagan ecosystem. Specifically, we call on the Government of B.C. to:

1. Prioritize legislation to require all watercraft owners to remove the drain plug of their watercraft prior to transporting it.
2. Increase inspection station funding back to at least 2017 levels of \$4.45 million per year.
3. Renew the public-private funding partnerships which assist in funding the inspection system

and are set to expire in 2021.

4. Establish a working group to explore options and partnerships to enable legislation which would require all watercraft entering B.C. to report for an inspection station prior to entering provincial waters.

Other jurisdictions have pushed ahead with legislative and resource measures to strengthen their efforts against invasive mussels, and we believe the Province of B.C. must take immediate steps to consider these approaches as examples of what could work in our province.

Thank you for your time and we look forward to hearing from you on this important matter.

Sincerely,



Krystin Kempton, President
Greater Vernon Chamber of Commerce

CC: Mel Arnold, North Okanagan-Shuswap MP
Eric Foster, Vernon-Monashee MLA
Chief Byron Louis, Okanagan Indian Band
Mayor Victor Cumming, City of Vernon
Mayor Jim Garlick, District of Coldstream
Chair Kevin Acton, Regional District of North Okanagan
Gail Wallin, Invasive Species Council of BC
Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association
Anna Warwick Sears, Okanagan Basin Water Board