



MEDIA RELEASE

August 15, 2018

Chamber Calls for More Enforcement Funding on Mussel Threat

Kelowna: The Kelowna Chamber of Commerce wants invasive quagga and zebra mussels kept out of BC's fresh waters – especially the iconic Lake Okanagan – forever. Starting in 2015, the Kelowna Chamber wrote and tabled policies calling on all levels of government to enforce prevention of mussel-infested water craft from entering BC's as-yet-unaffected fresh waterways.

The rapid spread of invasive zebra and quagga mussels through fresh waters east of Saskatchewan has had devastating impacts on hydroelectric power, marine shipping, fishing and tourism industries. These species recently spread through waterways in the southwest United States, and pose an imminent threat to fresh waters in British Columbia. The federal and provincial governments have made a start at monitoring, prevention and education, but decisive action is needed now to avoid irreversible damage to our marine and tourism industries.

Last week, the Chamber applauded the federal government announcement of \$100,000 over four years for research and \$400,000 over the same timeframe for education. However, the Chamber believes strongly that emphasis must be placed squarely on 24-hour border monitoring to intercept infested watercraft as they enter the Okanagan from both the US and from BC's eastern border.

“The Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO),” said Chamber president Carmen Sparg, “is to be commended for stepping up their education of boaters, and not spending solely on research. But, since their budget is just under \$19 million in 2018 to fight invasive species threats across Canada, the minor increase in spending in BC and the Yukon of just \$30,000 over last year won't make much of a difference.” Ontario lakes are already infested. Federal monies being spent there comprise nearly the entire invasive species budget. Federal and matching provincial funds must be allocated for more stringent monitoring and prevention in BC.

The Chamber recognizes the permanent damage an infestation would cause in the Okanagan. The loss of revenue if the Okanagan is invaded is estimated at \$40 million a year. Fighting an infestation would cost millions more.

Tom Dyas, Past President of the Chamber, who chaired the Policy Committee when the Resolutions were adopted says: “We repeat two of our five BC Chamber and Canadian Chamber policy resolution recommendations: (1) ensure that British Columbia's waters remain free of invasive mussels by providing appropriate resources to implement a compulsory watercraft inspection regime; and (2) build on the federal regulations, where each boat that crosses the international border needs to be inspected by CBSA. Shift provincial roving stations to the crossings at the Alberta border.”

For more information:

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