

Atamanenko urges feds to move faster on regulations to stop invasive mussels

By [staff1](#) on October 15, 2014



MP Alex Atamanenko has added his voice to that of the Okanagan Basin Water Board in calling on the federal government to move faster on enacting regulations aimed at stopping invasive aquatic species. The regulations, which would empower border officials to stop boats infected with zebra and quagga mussels from entering the Okanagan, have for years been making their way through the bureaucracy at the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. (Richard McGuire file photo)

Federal fisheries regulations aimed at stopping invasive mussels must be implemented before the 2015 boating season, says local MP Alex Atamanenko.

The federal MP for B.C. Southern Interior last week wrote to two cabinet ministers in the Conservative government to express the urgent need for federal regulations.

The letters were sent to Gail Shea, minister of fisheries and oceans, and Steven Blaney, minister of public safety and emergency preparedness.

The Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) has been calling for the regulations under the federal Fisheries Act that would allow border agents to inspect and detain boats suspected of transporting zebra and quagga mussels.

“The OBWB is still gravely concerned about the slow pace of progress for invasive mussel prevention in B.C.,” wrote Doug Findlater, OBWB chair, in a Sept. 15 letter to Okanagan MPs.

Consultations on the regulations concluded in April 2013 and they’ve been slowly moving through the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) since then.

Atamanenko said he initially wrote to Shea and Blaney about the issue in May.

Although the ministers were courteous to him when he hand delivered the letters, he has still not received a reply.

Zebra and quagga mussels currently infest waterways in eastern North America and they've made inroads into the southwest United States. OBWB estimates the cost of an infestation in the Okanagan at about \$43 million per year.

They encrust themselves on docks, boats, water intakes, bridges and other infrastructure. Mussels are usually spread between water basins by recreational boaters who fail to properly clean, drain and dry their boats after using them in an infected lake.

"I just think things are moving a bit slowly here," said Atamanenko. "Government does move slowly, but this is an important issue and it's very crucial that we get something in place by next summer."

In March an alert customs official at the Osoyoos border crossing discovered a boat coming into Canada encrusted with quagga mussels and heading into the Okanagan.

The driver towing the boat was co-operative and provincial conservation officers were notified to decontaminate the boat, but if the driver had not cooperated, the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) would not have had authority to detain the boat without the regulations. *(See story on pages 1 and 4)*

A DFO spokesperson said it is anticipated that his department will bring forward the proposed regulations in the fall of 2014. Once they are completed and approved, they will be published in the Canada Gazette Part I for 30 days of public comment.

"All comments received during the 30-day period on the proposed regulations will be considered before policy directions are finalized and revisions, if needed, to the regulations are made," the spokesperson said.

"In terms of the legislative process, it would be premature to speculate when the regulations would come into force as it depends on the level of feedback from the public," he said.

The objective of the regulations is to provide a "full suite" of tools to prevent the introduction of aquatic invasive species into Canadian waters and to manage their establishment and spread if introduced, he added.

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