



KELOWNA CAPITAL NEWS



Premier Christy Clark at her announcement in West Kelowna last week with Kilo, a dog being trained to sniff out zebra and quagga mussels. — Image credit: Alistair Waters, Capital News

More to do in fight against invasive mussels says water board

Okanagan Basin Water Board wants even stricter rules about mandatory boat inspections.

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The Okanagan Basin Water Board, which called last week's announcement by Premier Christy Clark that the province is beefing up its measures to keep invasive mussels out of B.C. lakes and waterways a "definite step forward," says there's still more the province can, and should, do.

"A lot of the items that have been on our wish list were announced," said OBWB chairwoman Tracy Gray. "As Premier Christy Clark noted, the province received our list of recommendations and has been working through it. We look forward to continuing to work with the province to close other potential loopholes that put our waters at risk. This includes tightening regulations."

While Clark announced 35 more auxiliary conservation officers will be hired for boat and watercraft inspections, and two more inspection stations added, the water board wants to see the new recruits made full-status officers so

they'll have the authority to pursue anyone who fails to stop at a station and have their watercraft inspected.

Anyone suspected of transporting mussels into B.C. could have their boat or other watercraft quarantined for up to 30 days, and if found to be transporting mussels—dead or alive—could face fines of up to \$50,000 for a first offence.

At last week's announcement, Clark said it is illegal to launch a boat into B.C. waters without having it inspected. But according to the environment ministry, the premier misspoke.

In an email to the *Capital News* clarifying Clark's remarks, the ministry said it's illegal to transport watercraft into B.C. infested with invasive mussels, and therefore illegal to launch one with mussels attached. It said all watercraft coming into the province must be checked. But there is no law currently on the books requiring all boats launched in B.C. to be inspected first.

"All watercraft entering B.C. and passing by an open inspection station must report in," said the ministry email. "Failure to stop at an open inspection station could result in a \$345 fine."

The email adds the province plans to post signs showing a 1-800 number for boat owners directing them to call to determine if their watercraft is at high risk for transporting mussels, and if it is, a follow-up inspection would be conducted.

Clark said only one of the 10 inspection stations will be open 24-hours per day, the one in Golden on the B.C.-Alberta border. The nine others will not be open at night. She said there would be signs directing drivers to other inspection stations.

The water board has had its Don't Move A Mussel public education and awareness campaign in place since 2012 in a bid to educate boat owners about methods of ensuring their watercraft remain mussel-free, including the Clean-Drain-Dry program.

The OBWB has also asked for legislative changes to be made making it mandatory for all watercraft entering B.C. to be inspected prior to launching in provincial waters and wants funding for the fight against the introduction of zebra and quagga mussels committed beyond 2018.

And it's not just the province that the water board is looking to for help. It is asking the federal government to:

- Increase training and funding for Canada Border Services Agency

- Increase funding for containment to provinces already mussel-infested such as Quebec, Ontario and Manitoba
- Increase funding to mussel-free provinces for prevention
- A commitment to research and education for prevention, containment, control and eradication methods
- Stronger federal participation in forums to address the mussel issue, such as the intergovernmental Pacific NorthWest Economic Region's Invasive Species Working Group.

"In addition to working with the province, we look forward to continuing to work with our federal government and other partners, to build a program that will keep our waters invasive mussel-free," said Gray.

"For our part, we are committed to continuing our efforts through our Don't Move A Mussel program, as well as providing funding and in-kind support to the Okanagan and Similkameen Invasive Species Society for lake monitoring and boater outreach."