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More needs to be done on invasive mussels

Dan Albas, MP Aug 22, 2018



I have often said that the wheels of Ottawa tend to turn quite slowly.

One of the issues I worked on in the last Parliament was the need to establish a regulatory framework in Canada related to invasive species legislation.

This was and remains a serious concern locally given the growing threat of invasive freshwater mussels to our region.

After considerable delay and much prodding we were able to have the new regulations in place for the 2015 boating season, however that was only the first of many steps required to protect the Okanagan and other freshwater lakes in British Columbia and Western Canada.

The concern now is funding.

Recently, when the prime minister visited the Okanagan, he and members of his caucus have been touting "\$500,000 in research, education and outreach to help prevent invasive mussels from reaching local waterways".

In turn, I have recognized the Liberal government for listening to our concerns and taking some action on this file.

Unfortunately the funding announced recently is spread out over a three to four-year time frame, meaning the actual impact is roughly \$158,000 annually.

As my opposition colleague from North Okanagan-Shuswap Mel Arnold pointed out, along with Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) and more recently the Kelowna Chamber of Commerce, this funding is nowhere near adequate to prevent invasive mussels from reaching our local waterways.

Make no mistake, the risks are very real.

It is estimated that an invasive mussel infestation could create economic loss of \$42 million annually in direct costs and lost revenue to the Okanagan region.

More concerning is that invasive zebra and quagga mussels could destroy critically needed habitat that would further threaten or even destroy our local Pacific Salmon population.



The OBWB has issued a comprehensive multi-point plan that will better protect our region from invasive mussels. The annual operating cost of this plan is roughly \$2 million.

To put that number into perspective, the current Federal Government's annual Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) funding is close to \$19 million. At the moment, 86 per cent of the annual AIS funding is spent in Ontario. Here in the Okanagan, this recently announced funding from the Liberal Government is less than one per cent of that.

I believe our Pacific Salmon habitat deserves more protection from the Liberals than less than one per cent of the AIS funding.

My question this week: Do you agree with me that the federal Liberal government should fully fund the request from the Okanagan Basin Water Board to better protect our region from invasive freshwater mussels?

I can be reached at Dan.Albas@parl.gc.ca or call toll free 1-800-665-8711.

Dan Albas is member of Parliament for Central Okanagan Similkameen Nicola.



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