



Ms. Kaili Levesque

Interim Deputy Minister

200 Kent Street

Ottawa, ON, K1A 0E6

By hand via Minister Thompson

December 4, 2025

Dear Ms. Levesque,

Thank you for your appearance at the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans this morning. Enclosed is the letter I cited when questioning you about federal resources for preventing the proliferation of aquatic invasive species in British Columbia.

The enclosed November 27 letter to Minister Thompson from the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) details the acute threats that invasive species pose to British Columbia. The letter also outlines the OBWB's proposed joint venture with the University of British Columbia- Okanagan to develop a rapid eDNA detection tool for invasive mussel biosecurity.

Please review this correspondence and provide a response to the Okanagan Basin Water Board and I as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Mel Arnold'.

Mel Arnold, M.P.

Kamloops- Shuswap- Central Rockies

Associate Shadow Minister for Fisheries

Cc. Mr. Blair Ireland, Chair, Okanagan Basin Water Board



Nov. 27, 2025

The Hon. Joanne Thompson, P.C., M.P.

Minister of Fisheries, Minister's office

200 Kent St. Station 15N100

Ottawa ON, K1A 0E6

Email: DFO.Minister-Ministre.MPO@dfo-mpo.gc.ca and joanne.thompson@parl.gc.ca

The Hon. Dominic LeBlanc, P.C., M.P.

House of Commons

Ottawa, Ontario

K1A 0A6

Email: Dominic.LebLANC@parl.gc.ca

Re: Calls to Action for Invasive Mussel Prevention

Dear Minister Thompson and Minister LeBlanc,

On behalf of the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB), I am writing to express growing concern over the critical failure of coordinated federal action to prevent invasive mussels from entering western Canada. While provinces like British Columbia have made meaningful progress through legislative amendments and regional partnerships, federal participation has been negligible—despite the clear national implications of a mussel invasion.

An introduction of zebra, quagga, or golden mussels into B.C. waters would have devastating consequences. The economic, environmental, and cultural losses would be measured in billions of dollars, affecting hydropower generation, irrigation systems, drinking-water utilities, and fisheries across multiple jurisdictions. This is not a provincial issue—it is a national one. Watercraft cross international borders under federal jurisdiction, and the frontline costs of prevention at those borders must not be carried solely by provincial budgets.

Calls to Action – Federal Government

1. Match provincial investments in invasive mussel defence.

We urge the Government of Canada to immediately establish a matching-fund model for invasive mussel prevention, beginning with contributions to western provinces that are currently reallocating limited provincial stewardship budgets to sustain border inspection programs. This funding should come from existing enforcement allocations within the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) or the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA), both of which share responsibility for protecting Canada's perimeter.

2. Invest in research and innovation to strengthen prevention.

Federal investment is urgently needed to accelerate development of early-detection tools, including environmental-DNA (eDNA) systems, mobile field laboratories, and watercraft tracking technologies such as QR-tagged inspection permits. The OBWB has acted decisively to fill this vacuum. In October, our Board passed a resolution committing \$200,000 over two years to the UBC Okanagan "Rapid

eDNA Detection Tool for Invasive Mussel Biosecurity” project—a groundbreaking initiative that will allow inspectors to detect mussel DNA on watercraft within minutes. This commitment is contingent on the project receiving matching funds for the remaining un-funded \$200,000.

This work represents the kind of innovation that federal science agencies should be championing and scaling nationally. We urge the federal government to support and co-fund this project and others like it through the DFO Aquatic Invasive Species Program or related research streams, ensuring these technologies are rapidly deployed at Canada’s borders. The technology may also be adapted to other biosecurity concerns including other invasive species and pathogens.

3. Update national risk mapping to include golden mussels.

Canada’s national invasive-species risk assessments must be updated to include *Limnoperna fortunei* (golden mussel), which can survive in lower-calcium waters and now poses a credible threat to uninfested regions throughout Canada, including those portions of the Great Lakes not already infested with zebra or quagga mussels. It would be a death knell to Great Lakes fisheries. The United States has already recognized this species as an emerging high-risk invader; Canada must do the same to remain aligned with international partners.

4. Establish public accountability for invasive mussel prevention.

We ask that the Government of Canada commit to issuing annual public progress reports on aquatic invasive species prevention. Transparent reporting—detailing funding, inspection volumes, detections, and risk assessments—would help demonstrate accountability and provide Canadians with a clear picture of the country’s readiness.

The OBWB has consistently demonstrated its commitment to prevention, innovation, and collaboration. However, without federal leadership, the gaps along Canada’s borders remain unaddressed. A national perimeter defence requires national responsibility.

Thank you for your attention to this critical national issue. We look forward to your response and to seeing tangible federal action to protect Canada’s freshwaters.

Sincerely,



Blair Ireland, Chair, Okanagan Basin Water Board

cc:

- Okanagan MPs and MLAs
- Okanagan Nation Alliance, Chiefs Executive Council
- Local Government Chairs and Mayors
- OBWB Board of Directors
- Invasive Species Council of B.C.
- Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association
- Shuswap Watershed Council
- Okanagan and Similkameen Invasive Species Society
- Central Okanagan Economic Development Commission
- Tourism Kelowna