

## **Vernon Chamber Pushes for Equitable Funding to Protect Against Invasive Mussels**

May 24, 2024

Vernon, BC - The Greater Vernon Chamber questions the call for a moratorium on out-of-province watercraft and is calling for action to prevent the spread of invasive mussels while continuing to support tourism and the economy of the Okanagan.

The Greater Vernon Chamber is urging the federal government to increase efforts to minimize the threat invasive mussels pose to the Okanagan's ecosystem and infrastructure.

"Increasing funding to protect our waterways is an extremely important issue that needs the attention of the federal government," said Kirndee Nahal, Greater Vernon Chamber President.

Currently, B.C. only receives 1.7 per cent of all federal funding to protect communities from invasive species, which is down from two per cent.

"There is a large disparity in the funding that the federal government has made available to BC" said Nahal "an increase in funding could gainfully be used toward creating mechanisms for watercraft inspections and invasive mussel awareness."

"We respect the approach that other organizations have taken in calling for a moratorium on out-of-province watercraft however the Greater Vernon Chamber believes that adequate funding to combat invasive species would be a better long-term solution to this issue."

The Chamber is also concerned with how such a moratorium will be enforced.

"Who will be tasked with stopping or fining out-of-province boats from entering the province? There is a cost to enforcement. If there's money and resources for enforcement, then perhaps the money can be better spent towards proactive and preventative measures rather than an outright ban," said Nahal.

The Chamber has engaged with members of the marine industry who question how such a moratorium will deal with out-of-province registered boats that never leave B.C.

"Seventy-five per cent of the two hundred boats we store are Alberta registered," said Ryan Smith, owner of Valley Marine.

"When people are at the boat launch how are they going to know the difference between an Alberta registered boat that stays here all year and one that doesn't. This may lead to some unfavourable interactions for locals trying to police the moratorium who might not know better."

The Chamber highlights that recent years have been challenging for the tourism sector as a result of the Covid pandemic and wildfires, not to mention the new legislation affecting short-term rentals.

"The last thing they need is another reason for tourists to choose somewhere else to travel," said Nahal.

"In the end, those calling for a moratorium and those that are against want the same thing and that's for the federal government to increase funding to protect our ecosystem and make sure our lakes can be used by local families and tourists for years to come."