

METRO VANCOUVER TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY RESPONSE AND RECOVERY TASK FORCE

MEDIA RELEASE

Tourism and Hospitality Response and Recovery Task Force outlines COVID-19's impact on the sector in Metro Vancouver

*Letters to Ministers Joly and Beare provide list of actions considered key
to the survival of thousands of businesses supporting the "visitor economy"*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

VANCOUVER, B.C. – APRIL 16, 2020—The Metro Vancouver Tourism and Hospitality Industry Response and Recovery Task Force, an umbrella group representing over 50 organizations in the travel and tourism sector, has today released letters to both the provincial and federal governments, urging action necessary to counter the devastating effects COVID-19 and Canada's response to the pandemic has had on the sector.

"Task Force leadership understands and supports science-based decision-making. We know our members in hotels, food service, event hosting, and many other areas of the visitor economy, have scrambled to ensure compliance with the B.C. government's *Pandemic Provincial Co-ordination Plan* and a range of federal response protocols as they have evolved," said Ingrid Jarrett, President and CEO of the BC Hotel Association and Task Force Co-Chair. "We also appreciate that all levels of government have worked to address the impact that pandemic containment strategies have had on so many British Columbians. Unfortunately, many of the initiatives which governments have launched have been inaccessible to most of us in the travel and tourism sector, and the biggest issue for our members – that of immediate-term liquidity – has not been addressed at all."

The Task Force outlined key areas of concern, in letters to both federal Minister of Tourism Mélanie Joly, and to Joly's provincial counterpart, Minister of Tourism Arts and Culture, Lisa Beare. In the letters, Task Force Chair Ted Lee (Acting CEO, Tourism Vancouver) along with Co-Chairs Nancy Small and Ingrid Jarrett indicate addressing liquidity, creation of an enhanced wage subsidy program, full government backing for BDC loans to small businesses, and greater availability of funding – through the Canada Emergency Business Account (CEBA) – are essential. The Task Force is also seeking an extension of the CEBA repayment period, and an increase in the non-repayable portion of those loans, noting these as critical elements needing to be addressed.

In addition to this, the Task Force is presenting governments with an innovative idea: implementation of a policy that prevents eviction of commercial tenants and establishes rent assistance for small businesses struggling to meet monthly lease payments. Similar programs have been put in place in some Canadian provinces, and in Australia, a landlord-tenant code of conduct has been created, to help support relationships between the two.

"While many businesses have felt the impact of COVID-19 over the last 30 days, it's important to remember that the hospitality industry in Metro Vancouver has now suffered through its third month of negative impact," said Chief Executive Officer for Tourism Richmond and Task Force Co-Chair,

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Nancy Small. “The devastation to our sector began in the mid to end of January, when many of our members – scheduled to host events associated with the Lunar New Year – felt the immediate effect of the loss of visitors from China and Hong Kong. The suspension of the summer cruise ship season, the cancellation of hundreds of signature festivals and events, and loss or postponement of large-scale meetings and global conferences all the way into the fall of this year have all spelled a months-long disaster, for those of us working to support this province’s visitor economy.”

The Task Force began with Tourism Vancouver, Tourism Richmond and the BC Hotel Association holding discussions in February, and within days, industry associations, individual entrepreneurs, business leaders and sector representatives joined forces, swelling numbers to include well over 50 member organizations. Task Force leaders have been liaising with members on weekly calls, and through a series of working groups dedicated to:

- quantifying the scope of the impact COVID-19 has had on the sector;
- identifying and responding to common issues and communicating sector needs; and
- looking ahead, to formulate a sector recovery strategy.

The Task Force is also working closely with the Tourism Industry Association of British Columbia (TIABC) to harmonize efforts to both inform and educate all levels of government.

“Our goal now is to continue the conversation that has started with these letters, both internally with our stakeholders and members, and externally with government,” said Small. “Our goal is to share information in both directions: advocating not only for ways that government can support our industries, but also to see where we can offer the skills and resources of our sector to government, as part of an effective pandemic response. Our combined contribution to the regional and provincial economy counts in the billions of dollars. We have a great deal to contribute to the province and to Canada, but equally, a great deal which needs protecting – in the immediate term, and for the future.”

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Note: A Task Force *Impact Assessment – Fact Sheet*, illustrating COVID-19’s impact on the sector, as well as a current Task Force *Member List*, have been distributed with this release.

For more information on the ***Metro Vancouver Tourism and Hospitality Industry Response and Recovery Task Force***, and/or to speak with spokespersons Nancy Small or Ingrid Jarrett, please contact:

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The Metro Vancouver Tourism and Hospitality Industry Response and Recovery Task Force meets weekly via conference calls, and many members are also contributing as active participants across four different working groups. Any organization representative or individuals active in the visitor economy are encouraged to join; more information is available by contacting Sabrina Tey at Tourism Vancouver stey@tourismvancouver.com

Who We Are

The ***Metro Vancouver Tourism and Hospitality Industry Response and Recovery Task Force***, including its many thousands of stakeholders, represents some of the largest industry-related employers and venues in B.C. Contributing approximately \$4.8 billion to the Metro Vancouver economy annually and supporting over 70,000 full time jobs, our members serve, host, transport, entertain, and accommodate millions of local, national and international guests annually.

The motivation behind convening the Task Force is to create a powerful, united, and action-oriented body to act as a coordinated voice for our sector. Our advocacy work – on behalf of our shareholders and members – is being advanced by four distinct working groups, focused on: Impact Assessment; Government Relations; Issues Management and Communications; and Sector Recovery Strategy. Our actions reflect the fact that few industries are as dramatically affected by the onset and spread of COVID-19 as is the tourism and hospitality sector.