

TUESDAY, APRIL 14, 2020

METRO VANCOUVER TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY RESPONSE AND RECOVERY TASK FORCE

Honourable Minister Beare,

Every year, the tourism and hospitality industry supports 70,000 jobs in Metro Vancouver and generates \$4.8 billion in economic activity. With the extreme impact on our sector due to measures taken to slow the spread of COVID-19, we are speaking with a united voice to effectively highlight the challenges our sector is facing. We write to you today as Chairs of the Metro Vancouver Tourism and Hospitality Industry Response and Recovery Task Force with our 50+ members representing over 1,500 businesses in the tourism and hospitality industry.

The tourism and hospitality industry in Metro Vancouver is significant as the primary gateway to British Columbia and Canada. Our sector, more than any other, reflects B.C. today: thousands of employees showcase our diversity to the world with unmatched festivals, food and hospitality; small businesses run by new immigrant families underpin much of our sector; women feature prominently on the front lines and in executive boardrooms; and growing Indigenous and adventure tourism businesses highlight our incredible natural landscape and history.

The actions taken by government, while appropriate for public health, have had a profound and debilitating effect on the tourism and hospitality industry, particularly in the short- and medium-term. Our sector, unlike others, has now slid into our third month of impact by COVID-19, after having first felt its effects in mid- to late January, with the collapse of visitors who regularly come to B.C. as part of their Lunar New Year celebrations. Most businesses now face extreme liquidity shortfalls, as revenues have all but disappeared and fixed costs such as rent, continue to accrue.

Steps your government has taken to support businesses and our employees to date – creation of the B.C. Emergency Benefit for Workers, and enabling tax deferrals, for example – as well as announcements about recovery measures that are expected in the coming weeks, are welcomed and supported by our operators. Yet, every day we continue to hear of businesses in our sector that will not be able to survive the necessary restrictions, as they relate to pandemic control, and be able to re-open, without additional support.

British Columbians have pulled together to weather this storm but to position B.C.'s tourism and hospitality sector for economic recovery, we need your support in the following three areas. We hope to work with you to advance proposals that will address our immediate needs and position us well for the future. Together, we must:

1. **Need for liquidity:** give businesses a fighting chance getting back on our feet by enhancing interest-free loan programs and/or enacting measures that prevent evictions of commercial tenants, similar to those you enacted for residential tenants in March and establishing provincial rent assistance for those businesses that are struggling to meet lease terms pay rents, similar to the program created in Prince Edward Island or the Landlord-Tenant Code of Conduct in Australia (attached);

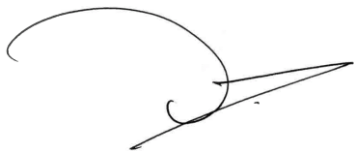
2. **Enhance and extend wage subsidy program:** keep people working by supplementing the federal wage subsidy either by topping up the 75 per cent currently available or extending the period for employers to draw the subsidy for up to six months as businesses need it most when they are reopening and working with a likely low volume of business.
3. **Investing in recovery:** make an immediate commitment to invest in recovery strategies focused on bringing tourism and hospitality-focused business back to Metro Vancouver and ensuring that DMOs across the province remain viable and be ready to engage;

In addition to these measures, we thank you and encourage you to continue urging your federal counterparts to step up in support of our struggling industry. While measures taken by the Government of Canada are far-reaching, they fail to be readily available to tourism and hospitality operators. Specifically, we ask you to advocate to the federal government for:

1. extending the wage subsidy to support those businesses and employees who are not working or working drastically reduced hours due to mandatory physical distancing restrictions on their business;
2. backstopping loans provided to businesses through BDC; and
3. increasing funding available to small businesses through the Canada Emergency Business Account and making a larger share of that funding non-repayable.

We thank you for your prompt attention to this urgent matter and look forward to working productively with you during this difficult time to ensure that Metro Vancouver's tourism and hospitality industry and across our Province can continue to thrive for years to come.

Sincerely,



Ted Lee
Acting CEO, Tourism Vancouver
Chair, Industry Task Force



Nancy Small
CEO, Tourism Richmond
Co-Chair, Industry Task Force



Ingrid Jarrett
CEO, BC Hotel Association
Co-Chair, Industry Task Force

CC: Honourable John Horgan, Premier
Honourable Carole James, Minister of Finance and Deputy Premier
Honourable Selina Robinson, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing
Walt Judas, CEO Tourism Industry Association of British Columbia (TIABC), and Chair,
Metro Vancouver Response and Recovery Task Force Government Relations Working Group

Attachments:

Metro Vancouver Tourism and Hospitality Industry Response and Recovery Task Force
Member List
Outline of Australia Code of Conduct for Commercial Rent Relief