



For Immediate Release – August 18, 2009

B.C. TOURISM INDUSTRY RESPONDS TO DISSOLUTION OF TOURISM BC

Vancouver, BC – The Council of Tourism Associations (COTA) held an emergency meeting of its members early Tuesday morning, August 18 to discuss the surprise announcement by the Government of British Columbia to dissolve Tourism British Columbia.

COTA and its members accept that this decision by government is final. However, at the COTA Council meeting nearly one-hundred B.C. tourism industry leaders were united in asking COTA to communicate publicly the following messages:

1. The tourism industry is gravely concerned about the decision to dissolve Tourism BC and to bring the agency under the direct management of the provincial government. Tourism BC was considered a world leader in destination marketing. Any new structure put in place to support tourism marketing in B.C. will be judged against the standard set by Tourism BC and its former CEO, Rod Harris.
2. Key principles that made Tourism BC a world leader, and which industry would like to see incorporated into the new marketing structure include:
 - a. An autonomous, industry-led governance model that is independent of political interference, and that operates on sound business principles.
 - b. Formula-funding, which enables long-term, strategic planning over a multiple-year time horizon.
3. COTA and its members remain committed to working proactively with government to restructure the tourism system and ensure we return to a strong growth position in the short-term. We would like to contribute to the rebuilding of an organization that will capitalize on the vast post-2010 marketing opportunities, and ensure that B.C. continues to be a recognized world leader in tourism.

COTA members also expressed concerns around the timing of this recent decision. The industry is already facing enormous challenges, including the global financial crisis, impacts of H1N1 on our key overseas markets (particularly Asia-Pacific), newly-imposed visa requirements for our fastest growing market (Mexico), new border documentation requirements, and now the proposed Harmonized Sales Tax (HST) that will make B.C. a more expensive travel destination. We look forward to working with the provincial government to address all these issues.

The Council of Tourism Associations is the recognized “Voice of the BC Tourism Industry,” representing B.C.’s major tourism sectors and regions. Tourism is the second largest industry in B.C., contributing \$13.8 billion annually to the B.C. economy, and directly employing over 120,000 workers.

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