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UNIQUE TOURISM PARTNERSHIP KEY TO NEW AGREEMENT WITH PROVINCE OF B.C. ON MID-COAST FERRY SERVICE

Vancouver, BC – A coalition of 15 First Nations, tourism and community stakeholders, known as the Mid-Coast Working Group (MCWG), today commended Premier Christy Clark, Minister Todd Stone and Minister Shirley Bond on the announcement to expand ferry service on British Columbia’s mid-coast starting next year.

MCWG had been working for more than a year on a First Nations’-led tourism strategy for the Cariboo Chilcotin Coast that includes a new ferry (to replace the Nimpkish) and the reintroduction of direct service between Bella Coola and Port Hardy as the catalyst. The service will also support routes that connect Bella Coola and other mid-coast communities such as Bella Bella, Ocean Falls, Klemtu and Shearwater.

The effort was jointly led and co-chaired by Keith Henry, CEO of the Aboriginal Tourism Association of Canada (ATAC), and Pat Corbett, past-chair of the Cariboo Chilcotin Coast Tourism Association (CCCTA) and former owner-developer of The Hills Health Ranch at 108 Mile.

Quotes

"This is a historic partnership that is likely to be viewed as a model for working with the province to bring forward the needs and interests of BC's mid-coast, First Nations, communities and the tourism industry across the province and in the region," said Henry.

Corbett added, "We found great unity in our discussions since the need for improved access to communities along the coast helps with economic development and job creation while solving a major transportation challenge."

"The entire BC tourism industry will benefit by this decision", said Walt Judas, CEO of TIABC. "The Great Bear Rain Forest is considered one of BC's jewels and a major attraction for visitors from all over the world. With improved access, combined with new First Nations products to be introduced in each of the next few years, the potential to grow tourism in the region has never been better," he added.

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Mid-Coast Ferry Service

"Aboriginal tourism businesses are among the big winners with today's announcement," said Brenda Baptiste, Aboriginal Tourism BC Chair. "Now the real work begins to tell the world that this part of BC is fully open for business. We're looking forward to drawing up our marketing plans together with fellow partners on the Mid-Coast BC Ferry Working Group."

"The Nuxalk community in Bella Coola is currently preparing to invest heavily in tourism for our people," said Chief Wally Weber. "We are building a \$1.5 million restaurant and adding 10 new mini long-houses for vacation rentals along the Bella Coola River, in addition to our recent acquisition of a local motel that we have renovated," he added.

"The fact that Prince William and Princess Kate are set to visit the Great Bear Rain Forest to spend a number of days with us clearly demonstrates that this region is an iconic part of the BC tourism experience," noted Craig Widsten of Shearwater Marine Group.

"The City of Williams Lake is very excited about what this means for our community and the Cariboo Chilcotin Coast region," said Councillor Jason Ryll. "Our city is much like a gateway and will see outstanding benefits from this announcement." he added.

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