



VANCOUVER ISLAND'S MARINE TOURISM SECTOR ADJUSTING TO NEW DFO FISHING & WHALE WATCHING MEASURES

Operators & Destinations Communicating its *Business as Usual*

Vancouver, Nanaimo – May 21, 2019 – The Tourism Industry Association of British Columbia (TIABC) and Tourism Vancouver Island (TVI) say that while the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) recently announced specific measures related to marine activities and conservation concerns, there are still plenty of areas to fish and/or whale watch all around Vancouver Island.

According to Tourism Vancouver Island CEO Anthony Everett, government's decision to restrict retention of prized Chinook in certain areas still allows recreational anglers to enjoy an amazing BC fishing experience. At the same time there are still many regions with full limits, as well as newly opened areas on the west coast of Vancouver Island due to the removal of the fin fishing closure.

"We recognize that it's slightly different than previous years, but at the same time the setting and the exceptional service provided by guides, lodges and other businesses connected to the recreational fishing sector remains unchanged. We will continue to deliver a world-class visitor experience," said Everett.

Similarly, a 400-metre avoidance zone placed on whale watching companies when viewing Southern Resident Killer Whales will mean a slight adjustment to operators that is expected to have some consequences for visitors.

"The new viewing distance required by DFO will mean our guests will not be viewing the Southern Residents. However, we have plenty of transients and other species up and down the coast that guests will be able to see at a relatively close and safe distance that will provide a thrill of a lifetime experience," said Alan McGillivray, Canadian president of the Pacific Whale Watch Association and owner of Prince of Wales Whale Watching, headquartered in Victoria.

McGillivray notes that while the increased distance to 400 metres is highly precautionary, he hopes that government will invest in more research to identify whether the measures are successful in helping orcas to forage for their primary food source - Chinook.

Walt Judas, CEO of the Tourism Industry Association of BC noted that while DFO measures were anticipated by the marine tourism sector, the impacts have been both immediate and measurable.

"Because the island's marine tourism sector contributes hundreds of millions of dollars and employs thousands of people both directly and indirectly, we are concerned that some of the measures will cost jobs and force business closures," said Judas.

Pointing to a recent BC Chamber of Commerce MindReader survey, Judas explained that 71% of businesses said they (or those in the value chain) have already experienced cancellations with over half citing client bookings are down some 31%, and one-fifth of businesses experiencing a whopping 50% rate of cancellations.

Judas said the concern extends beyond this season. “A quarter of the businesses affected say they’ll have to close for good either this season or next, and more than a third of business owners conceded that they will lay off staff. Once many of the skilled employees are gone, it may be difficult to get them back even if things returned to normal,” Judas explained.

While the non-retention of Chinook in specific areas is not an actual closure, due to lower guest preference for catch and release in tidal waters, 88% of respondents to the survey nonetheless believe Vancouver Island’s reputation as a great place to visit for a recreational fishing experience has been affected.

“While we must accept the measures and will adjust accordingly, we also want to work closely with government on Chinook abundance measures,” said Owen Bird, Executive Director of the Sport Fishing Institute of BC. “The currently proposed recovery plan focuses on long-term Chinook recovery, which will take decades to realize benefit. We’re calling for significant investment in hatchery enhancement projects and other initiatives to ensure we can return to abundant healthy stocks and opportunity for harvest in a short-term window for all stakeholders for the foreseeable future. Fraser River Chinook can’t wait.”

The BC Chamber MindReader survey received responses from 379 businesses, 313 of which were identified as being in the recreational fishing industry (i.e. guides, lodges), directly linked to the industry (i.e. accommodation, marine outfitters), or peripherally linked (i.e. spin-offs). [The number of businesses that responded to the survey renders the data statistically sound.](#)

BC’s tourism industry consists of some 19,300 businesses that employ over 137,000 people. The sector has enjoyed several years of record results for visitation, revenues and other key measures in most regions of the province.

The Tourism Industry Association of BC advocates for the interests of British Columbia's \$18B+ tourism industry. Tourism Vancouver Island is a not for profit association coordinating over \$1.5 million in advertising and promotional campaigns targeted at driving tourism business to the region.

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