

FROM THE FIRST NATIONS AND MUNICIPALITIES OF THE NORTH AND CENTRAL COASTS



OLD MASSETT VILLAGE COUNCIL



April 6, 2020

PREMIER JOHN HORGAN

West Annex Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

HON. DAVID EBY Q.C., ATTORNEY GENERAL

Room 232 Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

HON. MIKE FARNWORTH, MINISTER OF PUBLIC SAFETY AND SOLICITOR GENERAL

Room 128 Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

HON. CLAIRE TREVENA, MINISTER OF TRANSPORT

Room 306 Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

HON. MARC GARNEAU, MINISTER OF TRANSPORTATION

330 Sparks Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0N5

RE: HAIDA GWAI, NORTH AND CENTRAL COAST TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS

COVID-19 is an unprecedented threat to the survival of all citizens. The risk is especially acute to our Nations' Elders and seniors, and their critical role in our cultural identity through the knowledge only they possess and can pass down. Accordingly, we must take immediate emergency measures to protect them.

We have a short window of opportunity to work together to limit the introduction of COVID-19 into our coastal and Island communities. Given our geography and our united determination, an effective strategy of restricting non-essential travel is possible.

The First Nation signatories to this letter quickly implemented restrictions against non-essential travel and have been mandating that returning residents and nation members complete two weeks of self-isolation. Inspired by this leadership, some North and Central Coast municipalities and regional districts mobilized to support and extend these efforts.

Although all municipal Local States of Emergency are now suspended, there are urgent and informed local strategies that can be implemented for the safety and security of our communities.

British Columbia and Canada cannot stand by while the peoples of the North and Central Coast are exposed to non-essential travelers who may carry COVID-19 with them. With the spring and summer tourism and recreation season upon us, we believe this matter will only get worse as we are already seeing evidence of people coming from out of Province and other areas in BC for non-essential reasons including for fishing, hunting and other leisure activities.

Our risks are different from urban ones. Our health care providers have unequivocally communicated that our limited health care facilities and supplies are insufficient to handle even modest numbers of COVID-19 patients. A National and Provincial-led pandemic response will only be successful if it is enforced by local leaders. The Province, Canada and the RCMP have a moral and social responsibility to support and enforce non-essential travel restrictions and authorize municipalities and regional districts to do the same.

Restrictions against non-essential travel would bolster the measures advised by Provincial Health Officer Dr. Bonnie Henry and are successfully being used around the world to limit the spread of COVID-19. We cannot afford to wait and see what will come with the non-essential travelers currently entering our Region in order to escape urban lockdowns or seek the freedom of the country. We know that requests for people to voluntarily stay away will fall on the deaf ears of those who do not respect Indigenous rights and title, and those who feel the need to flee for their lives to areas of the Province that currently have no confirmed cases of COVID-19.

Moving forward, we need to work together - First Nations, the Province, Canada and municipalities - to restrict the influx of non-essential travelers, while allowing for people to return home and the delivery of goods, essential services, medical care and emergency response. Please have your appropriate officials contact the Council of the Haida Nation to take the next steps.

First Nations, municipalities, the Province and Canada can and must act together before the pandemic has unnecessarily spread to every community in our Region. We the undersigned with a unified voice and urgent purpose ask that the Province and Canada join us in restricting non-essential travel to Haida Gwaii, the North and Central Coast. This cannot wait.

cc: MP Taylor Bachrach, Skeena-Bulkley Valley

MLA Jennifer Rice, Parliamentary Secretary for Emergency Preparedness

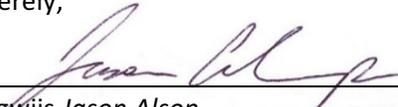
Deputy Minister Lori Halls, Emergency Management BC

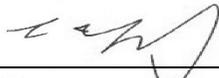
Hon. Selina Robinson, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing

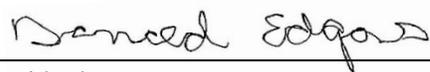
Deputy Minister Kaye Krishna, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing

Assistant Deputy Minister Tara Faganello, Local Government Division, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing

Sincerely,


Gaagwiis Jason Alsop,
President of the Haida Nation


William Yovanovich,
Chief Councillor, Skidegate Band Council


Donald Edgars,
Chief Councillor, OMVC


Samuel Schooner,
Central Coast Regional District Chair/Area E Director

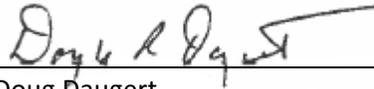

Harold Leighton,
Chief Councillor, Metlakatla First Nation


Garry Reece,
Mayor of Lax Kw'alaams

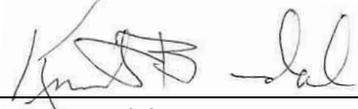

Marilyn Slett,
Chief Councillor, Heiltsuk Nation


Roxanne Robinson,
Chief Councillor, Kitsoo/Xai'xais Nation


Barry Pages,
North Coast Regional District Chair/Mayor of Masset

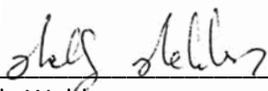

Doug Dugert,
Mayor of Port Clements


Kris Olsen,
Mayor of Queen Charlotte


Knut Bjorndal,
Mayor of Port Edward


Linda Innes,
Chief Councillor, Gitxaala Nation

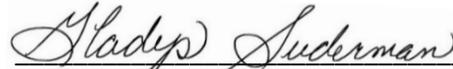

Arnold Clifton,
Chief Councillor, Gitga'at First Nation


Wally Webber,
Chief Councillor, Nuxalk Nation


Danielle Shaw,
Chief Councillor, Wuikinuxv Nation



Lee Brain,
Mayor of Prince Rupert



Gladys Suderman,
Chair of Board of Trustees, Ocean Falls
Improvement District