



Joint Press Release

Indigenous and Seasonal Tourism Businesses Facing Permanent Closure Without Immediate Support

Anishinabek & Cree Traditional Territory (Northern Ontario), April 21, 2020 — Indigenous Tourism Ontario (ITO), Nature and Outdoor Tourism Ontario (NOTO) with support from the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario (TIAO) are appealing to the Provincial and Federal Governments to provide meaningful support to all seasonal tourism businesses across Northern Ontario.

There are over 1,000 seasonal lodges, resorts and campgrounds across Northern Ontario that are currently struggling to survive this unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic. These businesses cater to anglers, hunters, outdoor recreationists, and those seeking Indigenous cultural experiences who are from Canada and the United States, but also all over the world.

These businesses and their guests contribute over \$400 million in GDP which is retained in Northern Ontario during a 4 to 5-month operating season.

There are hundreds of small Indigenous business and thousands of Indigenous people that rely on the tourism sector in Northern Ontario to provide revenue generating avenues and meaningful work experiences to maintain and try to improve their socio-economic conditions. Demand for Indigenous experiences has never been higher and many of these businesses and jobs will not exist in 3-12 months.

Although there is some great work being done, the small business relief eligibility criteria prevent many seasonal businesses from being able to apply for the various wage subsidy and loan programs. Without these supports and no revenues coming in, business owners are looking at the potential of closing their doors permanently.

NOTO believes support is needed from the Province to waive costs like annual Crown resource fees for bear management areas, land use permits and bait harvester licences. These are annual fees that tourism businesses in Northern Ontario pay in order to continue to offer some outdoor experiences on Crown land. The approximate total of these annual fees to the industry is \$1.2 million.

“Optimism is a notable quality, but what we must deal with is the realism that many small northern tourism businesses will not survive if they do not get timely and realistic help. We are asking our Federal and Provincial governments to focus on funding that will have a meaningful impact toward the survival of this



industry,” Said Bob Garson, NOTO President. “We must survive or efforts to revive the economy will all be for nothing. Tourism operators are in the midst of planning for a delayed start to an already short season or not opening at all this year.”

ITO President & Chief Executive Officer, Kevin Eshkawkogan states, “ITO agrees with NOTO, many businesses will not survive without tangible targeted help. In particular, the already vulnerable and emerging Indigenous tourism businesses in Northern Ontario are in serious jeopardy. Market demand was never higher and businesses are reporting that they have already lost 80-100% of their business revenue for 2020. ITO believes further support for Indigenous businesses through those best positioned to help is needed.”

For example, Aboriginal Financial Institutes across Ontario are the best suited to provide loan and non-repayable contributions to Indigenous tourism businesses of all sorts - from the Cultural Entrepreneur to larger Indigenous owned and controlled businesses. We applaud the assistance announced on Saturday, April 18th, by the Federal government.

As cancellations from domestic and international guests are filling email inboxes as a result of travel restrictions and from being responsible Canadians, operators are faced with difficult decisions and discussions with valued guests. Postponing trips to late in the season or to the following year or providing refunds all present different challenges for a business that relies on deposits to cover the high costs of opening or maintaining fixed costs while they remain unopen. Without a known date of when new revenues will begin to flow the stress on these seasonal small businesses seems unsurmountable.

“We are making every effort to bring forward recommendations that will provide meaningful support to our tourism business owners. We are working with regional, Provincial and Federal associations to raise awareness and will continue to do so. The reality is that Ontario needs tourism businesses to survive in order to help our economy recover when the time comes, particularly in Northern Ontario,” remarked Laurie Marcil, NOTO Executive Director.

“ITO is in full agreement with Mrs. Marcil and will be engaging a group of Indigenous ‘Business Support Brokers’ to help Indigenous tourism businesses navigate the many support programs and find a path to recovery and resurgence. Now is a great time to collaborate and find solutions so all Northern Ontarians can enjoy and prosper from the resource that surrounds all Northern Ontarians.” Stated Kevin Eshkawkogan.

Tourism Industry Association of Ontario (TIAO) President and CEO Beth Potter said, “Tourism is an integral part of Northern Ontario’s economy as it is in the entire province. We fully support the proposals put forward by NOTO and endorsed by ITO to ensure the survival of our industry and the SME’s that will be at the heart of our economic recovery. Business owners have told us via our comprehensive industry consultations that many are close to permanent closure if they don’t get immediate direct financial aid to help pay commercial rents, utility bills, loans and debts.



More debt deferral measures will simply saddle businesses with insurmountable debt that means they won't be able to kickstart our economy and rehire the hundreds of thousands of Canadians that have lost their jobs. We can secure the future of our local and provincial economies – but we must act urgently to do so.”

To view NOTO's complete list of recommendations to assist Ontario's resource-based tourism industry respond and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic crisis click [here](#).

About NOTO

Nature & Outdoor Tourism Ontario (NOTO) is a not for profit membership-based trade organization that supports the resource-based tourism industry through consultation and business supports. NOTO works with Government to ensure policies and regulations support the growth and vitality of the resource-based tourism industry in Ontario. NOTO collaborates with regional, provincial and federal tourism organizations to support this sector of tourism broadly. NOTO celebrated its 90th anniversary in 2019.

About ITO

The Indigenous Tourism Association of Ontario (ITO) is a provincial non-for-profit and membership association which focuses on creating partnerships between associations, organizations, government departments, and industry leaders from across Ontario and Canada to support the growth of Indigenous tourism in Ontario and beyond.

ITO represents the largest Indigenous tourism sector in Canada with over 550 Indigenous tourism businesses contributing over \$622 Million and almost 13,000 jobs to the Ontario economy. ITO has a focus to improve the socio-economic conditions of Indigenous people through tourism development.

About TIAO

The Tourism Industry Association of Ontario works on behalf of their membership, collectively representing 200,000 businesses and 400,000 employees, to take on pressing policy issues that impact the Ontario tourism industry. TIAO leads the way in government relations on behalf of the Ontario tourism industry, including tourism businesses and operators, destination marketing organizations, regional



tourism organizations, and educators. We provide evidenced-based policy recommendations to ensure the provincial government understands and addresses the multifaceted needs of the tourism industry.

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