

August 25, 2014

The Honourable Jason Kenney  
Minister of Employment and Social Development  
Government of Canada  
House of Commons Ottawa,  
Ontario, Canada K1A 0A6

Via E-mail: [jason.kenney@parl.gc.ca](mailto:jason.kenney@parl.gc.ca)

Dear Minister Kenney,

**Re: Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP), Urgent Exemptions Needed for Destination Mountain Resort Economies**

Thank you for attending the roundtable meeting and luncheon on August 6<sup>th</sup> to discuss the Temporary Foreign Worker Program. We appreciate that you took the time to hear our concerns and engage in open dialogue. I hope we communicated that our corridor is a vibrant region generating phenomenal tax revenue, that we have hard-working entrepreneurs who want to work with government and that we have an urgent need for workers, both domestic *and* foreign. Collectively the Whistler, Squamish and Pemberton Chambers of Commerce represent over 1300 businesses.

While we appreciate changes to the TFWP are intended to smooth out distortions in the Canadian labour market, we also heard the federal government is considering exceptions for discreet markets and that, “Whistler may be one of those areas”. We strongly agree with this assessment. The seasonal nature of our destination, mountain resort economy points to the wisdom of such an exception.

For communities like Whistler and other destination mountain resort or LNG towns with very low unemployment, the matter is painfully urgent. Whistler’s unemployment was last measured in 2013 at 2% by the Resort Municipality of Whistler’s Community Life Tracking Survey. A short walk around Whistler village will reveal restaurants that can only open half their floor space because of a shortage of kitchen and serving staff. The impact of a choked, worker-supply-pipeline – in part, due to changes in TFWP – will be experienced more acutely this winter and curb business capacity. Chamber members have reported guests are already stating they will follow the foreign-language speaking instructors (that have served them in seasons past) to resorts in Aspen, Vail and Japan for the 2014-15 winter season after hearing these instructors will not be available in B.C. this winter. Whistler’s ability to generate \$1.2 million in tax revenue per day (\$428 million annually) for the three levels of government will be significantly impacted if we cannot staff our businesses adequately.

The hiring of foreign workers will always be used as a limited and last resort in Whistler but it is a vital aspect of our tool kit and a critical concern in our economy:

1. Access to the TFWP for vital low-wage positions is not possible due to the way unemployment is currently measured in “our” region. Mainland southwest, the area Whistler is included in, is pegged at the 2013 rate of 6.7%. It does not make sense to put Whistler in this catchment nor does this number remotely reflect our market reality. We respectfully ask government to track more specific regional unemployment rates to better reflect market labour conditions. We urge government to develop a strategy to do this immediately and to exempt Whistler from the 6% rule this coming winter season.

2. We consider the \$1000 LMIA fee to be excessive and believe an exemption is reasonable for destination mountain resorts, in the same way government does for other seasonal industries such as agricultural. However we would also welcome alternative structures in the interim, such as longer validity periods for visas or pro-rating LMIA costs based on the number of months visas are valid. Consider that 36% of our members report that TFWs make up over 30% of their workforce (source: attached white sheet) – this new fee will essentially prohibit many of our members from participating in the program and will drastically limit their operational bandwidth and ability to grow. TFWs remain a critical complement of Whistler's overall workforce.

We hope you will be responsive to the unintended consequences of the recent changes to the TFWP and swift in your delivery of exceptions to deserving markets like Whistler. The matter is urgent and our window of opportunity to sufficiently staff our businesses is beginning to close as we prepare for our winter season.

Sincerely,



Val Litwin, Chief Executive Officer  
Whistler Chamber of Commerce

CC:

**Government of Canada**

- The Honourable Chris Alexander (*Minister of Citizenship and Immigration*)
- The Honourable Maxime Bernier (*Minister of State, Small Business and Tourism, and Agriculture*)
- The Honourable John Weston (*MP for West Vancouver – Sunshine Coast – Sea to Sky Country*)

**Government of British Columbia**

- The Honourable Shirley Bond (*Minister of Jobs, Tourism and Skills Training*)
- The Honourable Naomi Yamamoto (*Minister of State for Tourism and Small Business*)
- The Honourable Jordan Sturdy (*MLA West Vancouver – Sea to Sky*)

**Canada West Ski Areas Association**

- David Lynn (*President & CEO, CWSAA*).
- Steve Paccagnan (*Board Chair, Panorama Mtn. Village; CWSAA BC-Yukon Zone Chair*)
- Maureen Collins (*Zone Chair, CWSAA; Controller Cypress Mountain*)
- Dave Brownlie (*President & CEO, Whistler Blackcomb; CWSAA Director*)

**Resort Municipality of Whistler**

- Nancy Wilhelm-Morden (*Mayor*)

**British Columbia Chamber of Commerce**

- John Winter (*President & CEO*)