

To: Premier Horgan and Minister Donaldson

As Mayors of forestry dependent communities on Vancouver Island, we are raising our voice to support our residents who work in the sector and the businesses that employ them.

We support a healthy and sustainable coastal forest industry. We are committed to working with our residents, the provincial government, labour, industry, First Nations and interested stakeholders to ensure we continue achieve that goal. There are two issues that are top of mind for us as community leaders on the north island: old growth and the overall competitiveness of the forest industry.

Old Growth

Single issue focused special interest groups seem to be driving a narrative that old growth logging can be stopped immediately and there will be little impact to our communities – this is false. Over 20,000 jobs on B.C.'s coast rely on forestry. The impacts of an immediate end to old growth logging would be severe for the families who rely on these good-paying jobs.

Our communities are home to some of the most productive forests in Canada and we rely on them for recreation, as well as economic benefit. Both these industries, tourism and forestry, have existed in a balance for generations and this can be maintained, provided we continue to manage our forests properly. Unfortunately, there seems to be a push by special interest groups that would like to tip the balance towards conservation and shut down all old growth logging. More than half (520,000 hectares) of B.C.'s old growth forests are under some form of protection, through parks, management zones and wilderness areas. This is a good thing, but we cannot continue to erode the timber available for logging and expect the same level of economic activity.

At the Association of Vancouver Island and Coastal Communities annual convention in April, the City of Victoria proposed a resolution that would have decimated the forest industry in our communities. Thankfully the resolution was withdrawn, but only after some rigorous lobbying and procedural maneuvering to allow delegates to speak to the resolution. Had this not been achieved it would not been debated and, likely, passed. Unfortunately, this has become a common theme at local community conferences, large cities present unbalanced resolutions calling for moratoriums or banning resource extraction with no consideration regarding impacts on the small communities where the activities occur.

We are aware of the assurances your government has publicly provided that a moratorium on old growth logging will not occur under this government, however, we understand a new "old-growth management plan" is under development. This makes us concerned. Any revised old-growth management plan has the potential to significantly impact our communities. We appreciate the promise for public consultations and will be keen to participate, but the outreach must be meaningful and not simply government checking a box or applying a rubber stamp to something that has been crafted behind closed doors in Victoria. Additionally, this issue is too important to be coopted by special interest groups whose membership largely reside in large cities and fail to understand how their proposals will impact forestry dependent communities.

While we disagree with the need to prepare a new old-growth management plan, we are seeking your commitment that economic values will be weighted as much as social and ecological values as part of any management plan proposed by government. Furthermore, we feel the consultation needs to be inclusive of all interested parties from the beginning. We trust local governments and industry will be engaged at the beginning of the process and not included as an after-thought.

Competitiveness of the Coastal Forest Sector

We are becoming increasingly concerned by how forest policies are adding cost burdens onto our community forests and onto the harvesting industry. Ultimately, the negative impacts come down to jobs. Forestry across the province is in a downturn with weak markets and increasing costs becoming the proverbial straw that will break the camel's back. Our coastal forest industry needs to be globally competitive, the operating costs are already high.

We urge government to take the steps necessary to address the impacts of your policy decisions on communities. Our community forest is not able to absorb the increased burdens they have casued. In particular, we are asking that you reconsider the Fibre Recovery Zones and how stumpage fees are charged so that we can continue to generate income for our communities from the community forest and industry can continue to provide the important, well-paying jobs to our residents.

We all look forward to discussing forestry issues when we meet at the upcoming UBCM convention in September.

Sincerely,

Mayors