



## MORE FEDERAL ASSISTANCE REQUIRED

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Interior forestry sector was already facing significant challenges as a result of the mountain pine beetle epidemic, record-breaking forest fire seasons and a declining lumber market. The ILA's board of directors was actively lobbying the Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development to identify solutions to assist its members through these challenging times. While there have been some small successes, it's very obvious that more has to be done.

our conversations with Minister Donaldson and his staff that relief may be coming. Fast forward to October 21, 2019, when the federal election resulted in a new natural resources minister, which unfortunately caused another delay.

In Spring 2020, Premier Horgan and Prime Minister Trudeau met to discuss the forest industry. Minister Donaldson then re-engaged with the new Minister of Natural Resources, Seamus O'Regan and again, there was cautious optimism as his roots are tied to the resource

Timber harvesting contractors got back to work and found new ways to ensure the safety of their employees and families while still making sure the right log got to the right place. Unfortunately, these new measures came at a financial cost that is borne by the contractor; yet another financial pressure that contractors can ill afford.

As indicated in recent federal government news releases, they recognize the importance of resource-based industries as providing economic, social, and environmental benefits for our country, and that they're a key factor in Canada's economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic; however, from our perspective, it's clear they are not all regarded or funded equally.

On July 10, the Federal Minister of Natural Resources announced up to \$30 million in economic relief for the forest sector to offset additional costs due to COVID-19 safety measures for small and medium enterprises. While much needed, unfortunately this is for the entire country and will be available in the early fall to be administered by the individual provinces. What's unknown is how the funding will be allocated across the country and what criteria will be used to ensure that it goes to those who need it the most. These are critical questions that need to be answered and quickly.

On August 5, by comparison, the Federal Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard announced \$469.4 million to support the hardship faced by Canada's fish and seafood harvesters due to COVID-19.

So, while programs like CERB and CEWS are appreciated, I think we can agree the federal government could do more to support the forestry sector. Therefore, I ask each and every one of you, regardless of your association affiliation, to call your member of parliament and remind them of the importance of what you do for British Columbia and our country's economy.▲

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Government is feeling the effects of these challenges as well; a declining forest industry results in declining revenue for government, which results in fewer dollars available to assist our industry. In February 2020, government released its What We Heard report following last year's Interior Forest Sector Renewal public engagement, and while the feedback is interesting, if there is not more done now to assist contractors financially, the results may never see the light of day.

Today, what resonates the most with ILA members is that the federal government needs to do more to assist our industry. In August 2019, Minister Donaldson engaged with then Federal Minister Amarjeet Sohi requesting federal financial assistance for forest sector workers and communities in British Columbia. Provincial forest ministers from across Canada were also engaged in the request to assist because in reality, if it can happen to BC, it can happen to any other province as well. At that time, dialogue was ongoing and we were optimistic through

sector; being born and raised in Newfoundland, he knows firsthand when a community is dependent on a natural resource to survive. Ongoing discussions ensued, committees were struck, and time marched on with still no result.

In March 2020, the ILA was contacted by the House of Commons' Standing Committee on Natural Resources to let us know they were going to undertake a study on the crisis in the forest industry to find out what actions the federal government needs to take. They asked if we would participate by providing witnesses and for industry stakeholders to provide relevant information. You did not have to ask us twice, but apparently you do, as we never heard from them again.

Also in March, our nation plunged into a pandemic, but as Canadians we rose to the challenge and managed to keep moving forward through this most difficult time. Our industry, like many others, was designated as an essential service and, as always, we also rose to the challenge to ensure that our economy remains strong.

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