

*Cortes Island Business and Tourism Association
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We, the Cortes Island Tourist and Business Association (CIBATA), are an organization whose mission is to promote Cortes Island as a year round tourism destination, in turn supporting a sustainable and growing local economy. We represent vacation rental accommodations, eco-tourism operators, shops, restaurants, grocery stores, marinas, and other business services that cater to visitors (includes almost all businesses on the Island).

Our members are unanimous in their concern over the rising costs and the proposed reduction in ferry services to Vancouver Island and thence on to our island. Previously we have had a viable and vibrant economy and a diverse cross section of people living here. But businesses have suffered severe setbacks with the economic down turn accompanied by a large increase in ferry rates, so that many will have little chance of rallying without a major change in strategy by the B.C. Ferry Corporation.

The percentage of retirees has grown disproportionately compared to the numbers of younger workers and their families who can still afford to remain on the island. The increased cost of shipping goods to and from Cortes discourages business ventures from taking off or prospering. All this leads to the fracturing and the isolation of families, increasing the need for them to travel for support services that are no longer available locally.

We are witnessing a downward spiral where the presence of fewer families leads to fewer people, which leads to discontinued services and decreased business opportunity, all negatively impacting the health of the island economy and the stability of our community's social support systems.

Tourism is the foremost growing industry on the West Coast, and many visitors to B.C. have traditionally come from the U.S. If ferry service continues to be inaccessible or out of step with the Washington State ferry service, U.S. travelers may have more incentive to choose the affordable option rather than range farther from home.

Cortes Island competes with many destinations that have NO costly ferry fares with which to contend. We strongly feel that as Canadians and Provincial residents, we should share the benefits of a free Provincial Transportation system. All Island residents and businesses have been saddled with an unfair disadvantage since the B.C. Ferry Corporation decided to sever us from the Provincial highway system. We are not on a level playing field at this time.

Rather than alienating small businesses at every turn, government should be encouraging our endeavours to maintain a well-balanced, sustainable community. Taxes can not be collected from an emptied coffer.

Sincerely, the Executive members of Cortes Business and Tourism Association