



*Rachel Blaney*

Member of Parliament  
North Island-Powell River

The Honourable Mélanie Joly  
Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages

February 22, 2021

*Via Email*

**RE: BC Regional Development Agency**

Dear Minister Joly,

I am writing regarding the establishment of the Regional Development Agency for British Columbia and to persuade your government to invest in economic development in my riding, North Island—Powell River, which is comprised of the northern half of Vancouver Island, and a coastal portion of the mainland surrounding Powell River, in British Columbia. It is a beautiful, rugged, rural and remote region that is home to the most salmon fish farms in all of Canada, as well as over twenty Indigenous communities.

Minister, I commend you for consulting British Columbians on the creation of the new development agency for the province. I sincerely hope that you were able to extend an invitation to participate in your roundtable discussions to Indigenous and local business and community leaders from my riding because it is important that you, as Minister for Economic Development, gain a better understanding of the economic needs of this region.

The riding that I represent is suffering from negative economic impacts as a result of a combination of events largely outside our control. A 10-month long forestry strike ended in early 2020 and was followed by the COVID-19 pandemic which effectively shut down a thriving tourism industry. The paper mill in Powell River has been curtailed since April due to supply

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chain and market issues. New restrictions on chinook salmon retention have reduced our popular sports fishing industry. Then in December, your government announced the decision to phase out the licenses for the open-pen salmon farms in the Discovery Islands. The aquaculture industry is a significant employer in the region, and while I respect Minister Jordan's decision, it will impact many sectors and businesses in my riding.

It's my understanding that one of the priorities of your mandate includes helping Minister Jordan to "develop a comprehensive blue economy strategy aligned with Canada's economic recovery and focused on growing Canada's ocean economy to create good middle class jobs and opportunities for ocean sectors and coastal communities, while advancing reconciliation and conservation objectives."

Minister, there is no region more fitting of this mandate than the one I represent. We have an ocean economy. The conservation and restoration of wild Pacific salmon habitats is a high priority for all of our residents. We are highly concerned with the climate crisis. We are actively engaging in reconciliation projects with the First Nations in our area. And we are also suffering economically, in part because of the decisions of your government.

That is why I am making this substantial plea for your government to offer deep, sustainable and long-term economic support to the north Island region.

I invite you to consider North Island—Powell River for a branch location of the new regional economic development agency for BC. It makes sense that your department will want to target economic growth in rural and remote areas of the province because these are the places that need to break the long-suffering cycle of boom and bust resource economies. Having a government office in one of our communities would allow your department to experience first-hand the challenges of connectivity and transportation in rural and remote regions, which can only lead to better local economic outcomes for all who are to be served by this agency.

Canada's economic recovery from COVID-19 must include a multi-lens approach on support for rural and remote regions, such as the one that I represent. I invite you to explore my motion on this topic, [M-53](#), for a thorough exploration of the principles that must guide the federal government in offering economic recovery support to communities like ours.

I will not hide the truth from you, Minister. I want your department to be influenced by the economic realities of my riding. It is vitally important that you understand the needs of the people of North Island—Powell River because we need your help to implement solutions. We want to build back with economic revival ideas that come from local residents and businesses. I hope you understand this is not a criticism but a reality that must be fulfilled if we aim to have successful, healthy and economically viable communities born out of this pandemic.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my plea. I am always open to having further discussions at your convenience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Blaney', written in a cursive style.

Rachel Blaney, MP

Cc: Alistair MacGregor, MP