



Worker shortage a reality for Prince Rupert and Port Edward: new study shows

Aboriginal workers offer part of the solution for labour shortage

08/16/2016 (Vancouver) – Employers in Prince Rupert and Port Edward will have to develop strategies to increase labour participation rates to avoid shortages in the light industrial, retail and hospitality sectors as workers choose more high-paying jobs in the region, according to a new study released by the Asia Pacific Gateway Skills Table (Skills Table).

The *Prince Rupert/Port Edward Labour Supply Study* found that labour will be sufficient to meet the demands of the anticipated port expansions in 2017 as more workers will gravitate toward higher-paying positions offered by port facilities and related employers. As a result, the other industries identified will have a difficult time competing for labour because their business models restrict them from offering more competitive wages.

There are other factors contributing to the shrinking labour supply in the region including an overall declining population in the region, a flat youth population, high rates of out-migration and a retiring workforce. Similar to many other rural communities in British Columbia, Prince Rupert and Port Edward struggle to maintain their population and attract new people to fill the labour gap. By 2030, the proportion of working age population in the region is expected to decline from 67 per cent in 2011 to 60 per cent.

“To overcome the labour shortage in this region, detailed local planning efforts will need to be made to maximize the local workforce,” said Krista Bax, Executive Director, Asia Pacific Gateway Skills Table. “Developing employer driven solutions to break down existing barriers to get more people in the local labour force is needed to increase participation of local First Nations, women and the local part-time workforce.”

The study identifies that local First Nations could help with the labour supply. It reports that local First Nations such as Lax Kw’alaams, Metlakatla and Kitkatla have young populations with many people still unemployed and underemployed. About 43 per cent of this region’s population has Aboriginal identity, compared to 5.4 per cent in all of British Columbia, making the area unique and unlike any other in Canada.

“Prince Rupert and Port Edward are in an economic transition as we move toward an economy based on trade and services,” said Jim Rushton, Manager, Labour, Corporate and Government Affairs, DP World, and member of the study’s project committee. “While the impact of industrial growth in the region will put pressures on specific industries, it also presents opportunities to attract new talent to the region and develop sustainable workforce strategies for those who already live here.”

The study examined the evolution and origins of the current labour pool in Prince Rupert and Port Edward, the issues impacting labour supply, and the potential sources of labour. A project committee was formed by the Skills Table, BC Maritime Employers Association, and selected employers from Prince Rupert and Port Edward to determine the capacity of the labour supply in the region.

The project was managed by the Skills Table and funded by the Government of Canada's Sectoral Initiatives Program.

About Asia Pacific Gateway Skills Table

The Asia Pacific Gateway Skills Table is a non-profit, regional partnership between labour, business and education/training institutions. Its mission is to ensure the Asia Pacific Gateway has enough people with the right skills and training to meet its needs.

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