



# **Position Paper: Canada Select Program Criteria Changes and Concerns**

## **Background**

The Western Canada B&B Innkeepers Association (WCBBIA) is a British Columbia-registered society representing Bed & Breakfast owners/operators in British Columbia, Alberta and Yukon. These properties are committed to high standards in the provision of hospitality and adherence to professional principles such as service, quality control and accountability.

WCBBIA members acknowledge that Canada Select plays a role in the professional component of their businesses as a valid and worthwhile system for advising travelers of the comparative merits of a variety of types of accommodation properties. Its star ratings are a valuable guideline for travelers whose needs and wants vary.

WCBBIA pro-actively supports the Canada Select program in the following ways:

- WCBBIA recommends that members apply for and receive star ratings
- WCBBIA sets a minimum standard of 3 stars (or equivalent) for membership in WCBBIA whether within British Columbia or outside
- WCBBIA, after considerable negotiation, has waived the bulk of its own inspection process deferring to the Canada Select inspection process to ensure that WCBBIA's own standards are met
- WCBBIA publishes Canada Select news in its ezine, or online bulletin, as a service to the Canada Select program. This is done almost as soon as the information is received
- WCBBIA takes initiative in resolving complaints re-directed from Canada Select when they are regarding non-professional behaviour of WCBBIA members.

## **Issues**

Recent occurrences in the Canada Select mode of operation have caused concern within the B&B community. These modes include:

- A. Decision to Undertake a Survey in 2003**
- B. The Methodology of the Surveys & Interpretation of Survey Results**
- C. Level of Pre- and Post-Consultation with B&B Segment Stakeholders**
- D. Proposed New Criteria**
- E. Inspection Fairness, Breadth and Objectivity**

WCBBIA is very interested in acting as an agent to bring about a satisfactory resolution to keep our unique symbiosis working.

## **Preamble**

Generally B&Bs believe themselves to be catalysts in providing escapes from the whirl-wind, work-a-day world, whether for a romantic interlude, a pampering extravagance or a return to quieter, unhurried times.

There are other accommodation niches that fulfill other needs ... the needs of commercial travellers, extreme sports aficionados, exotic settings hedonists, outdoors enthusiasts, etc. Bed and breakfasts have earned a reputation for relaxing home-like settings -- sometimes quite luxurious -- coupled with personalized guest interaction, in residential or agricultural settings.

B&B owners/operators delight in making their guests feel "at home", welcomed, almost "a part of the family". Guests look for and expect that milieu and environment when they choose Bed and Breakfasts.

All this occurs within a belief that quality of service, dedication to hospitality, level of comfort, and quality of amenities need not be compromised.

## **Rationale for WCBBIA Survey of Canada Select B&Bs in BC**

Immediately after the announcement of new criteria by Canada Select, WCBBIA disseminated Tourism BC notations and explanations on the program changes. There followed a vociferous outcry from members.

WCBBIA believed it necessary to hear from all B&B stakeholders in British Columbia to determine if its members' concerns were founded and wide spread.

Having heard largely negative comments about the new set of criteria from B&B associations in eastern Canada, WCBBIA elected to conduct its own study.

A survey of 197 British Columbia Canada Select B&Bs rated 3-star or greater was undertaken in August 2005. The response rate was an exceptional 34 percent. This unusually high participation is a strong indicator of the high feelings surrounding Canada Select's current agenda of criteria changes for B&Bs.

The results of the survey are included here as Attachment A.

## Detailing of Issues

### **A. Decision to Undertake a Consumer Research Study in 2003**

The decision to undertake a survey of travellers to anticipate changes to the criteria of the Canada Select program is understandable. Frequent surveys must be taken to maintain the Program's currency with the needs and wishes of consumers and many years had passed since the previous study.

It is interesting to note that the 2003 survey results as reported in a November 2004 Canada Select press release concluded that "91% of respondents felt the Program's star ratings accurately reflected their expectations." 91% is a significantly high number and begs the question "Why change what is working so well?"

### **B. The Methodology of the Survey**

#### **1. Muddied Logic**

The following is excerpted from the 2003 Consumer Research Study

*"Internet Access Becoming More Important*

◆ *According to Hotelier Magazine (September 2003), Choice Hotels, which manages some 270 properties across Canada, experienced a growth in Internet bookings of some 300% over a 3-year period from 2000 - 2003. The same article notes that accommodation bookings amount to almost one-quarter of all consumer Internet travel transactions.*

◆ *It is clear that a majority of customers access information about travel and accommodations on the Internet (whether or not they actually book online), and these same customers wish to access the Internet from their accommodations while traveling."*

Statement 2 is a major leap in logic from statement 1. The fact that customers use the internet to plan travel cannot be meant to infer that they want internet access where they stay.

#### **2. Minimally Supported Conclusions**

It appears from the information found within the study that respondents to the survey were requested to compose a wish list of features. Given these circumstances it is not difficult to reason that travellers might invent a whole range of high-end features/amenities they might want. The survey details are filled with anomalies.

Example: at the 2-star level 10% of respondents thought that cottages should provide an outdoor pool. Yet at the 3-star level, the pool amenity is not even mentioned.

This strange anomaly should have been caught, an explanation found and perhaps a mini-re-survey done of the respondents.

Example: at the 3-star level, 6% wanted to see hotels provide (in-room) kitchen facilities; 4% wanted to see B&B's provide kitchen facilities. 5% wanted to see B&Bs provide complimentary breakfast.

It should have been explained to the respondents that  
 a) it is not generally-speaking legal for B&B's to have kitchen facilities in Bed & Breakfast rooms, and  
 b) all B&Bs serve complimentary breakfasts and it is not necessary to list it as an amenity.

Example: at the 4-star level, only 6% thought B&Bs should have Internet Access, and only 7% thought cable TV should be provided. At the 5-star level, internet was at 8% and cable fell to 5%.

Yet 14% at the 4-star level thought B&Bs should have mini-bars and a full 20% could not think of anything they might want at the B&B 4-star level.

Two criteria requirements have been forged out of very low demand ratings on a "wish list" for Internet Access and Cable TV, but the 14% mini-bar was ignored.

**C. Pre- and Post-Consultation with B&B Stakeholders**

WCBBIA prides itself on its readiness to cooperate and collaborate with other Non-Governmental Organizations who do public service (NGO's).

WCBBIA is ready to assist in the pre-survey process at any time the Canada Select program believes a new survey is warranted in a variety of ways:

- In the preparation of the Scope and Purpose
- In the preparation of Qualifying Criteria for participants
- In the matter of question clarity and suitability

WCBBIA was disappointed that the 2003 Survey did not include input from bed and breakfast owner associations across the country and that the post-consultation comments WCBBIA itself made to Canada Select through Tourism BC were neither responded to nor acted on.

**D. WCBBIA's Canada Select B&B Survey Results  
 re: Proposed Setting of New Criteria (by Star Rating) (see Attachment A)**

**1. Amenities Requirements Changes**

**a. New Telephone Requirements**

Disagreed	Agreed	Service in place	Neutral	Not applicable	No answer
25%	12.5%	44%	14%	4.5%	0%

B&B operators who disagree believe that a telephone is an infringement on the quiet and privacy a guest comes to a B&B to enjoy. Most of these B&Bs have a telephone available (or one which can be made available) in a common space for guests to use. B&B operators are "on premises" and can respond to an urgent incoming call for a guest at all hours, to relay an important message or to place a call for emergency assistance for a guest.

### b. New Television Requirements

Disagreed	Agreed	Service in place	Neutral	Not applicable	No answer
12.5%	16%	56%	11%	4.5%	0%

B&B operators who disagree believe that a television in a room is an infringement on the quiet and privacy a guest comes to a B&B to enjoy. They believe it will be a distraction to the guests in other rooms within the premises. Many of these B&Bs have a high quality television and VCR or DVD available in a common space for the guests to use.

### c. New Technology Requirements

Disagreed	Agreed	Service in place	Neutral	Not applicable	No answer
25%	25%	19%	11%	8%	12%

B&B operators who disagree believe that high technology is a distraction for guests who want rest and relaxation of the type a B&B experience promises them. Guests who require email or internet access are provided with this on the owner's computer or are directed to an internet cafe.

## 2. Proposed Amenities Requirements as Detractions

### a. New Amenities Requirements a Detraction.

In response to the survey question #4 "Do you think these new requirements will enhance or detract from the qualities that make your B&B what it is?"

Detract	Enhance	Neutral	Not applicable	No answer
51.5%	34%	0%	0%	14.5%

B&B operators generally believe that high technology, world news, familiar TV programming and family-back-home interruptions are a distraction for guests who want the rest and relaxation they have pre-booked and look forward to.

### b. New Amenities Requirements add Cost without Benefit.

In response to the survey question #5 "Do you currently offer TV connected to cable or satellite in your rooms?"

Yes	No
56.5%	43.5%

This criteria change requires 43.5% of B&Bs to add an amenity, with attendant ongoing costs, which B&B operators believe is not important to the clientele they know best.

In response to the survey question #7 “Do you currently have telephones available in your guest rooms as opposed to the common area?”

<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
44%	56%

This criteria change requires 56% of B&Bs add an amenity that could involve substantial re-wiring costs and/or the purchase of expensive multi-handset telephone systems. For some it would mean the ongoing cost of a second dedicated line. B&B innkeepers wish to avoid in-room noises such as phones ringing and excitedly loud conversations. The ambience they are attempting to create will be destroyed.

In response to the survey question #8, “How do you currently monitor/control guest long distance telephone use?”

<b>Trust (No Method)</b>	<b>Block or Monitor</b>
53%	47%

Having in-room multi-handset phones opens up the possibility of minor fraud; visitors can place long-distance calls without permission or payment and B&B owners will have no knowledge of which guests placed such calls. The alternative is a long-distance “blocking” system not in keeping with the ambience of a B&B.

In response to the survey question #9 “If you currently do not have TV with cable or satellite in the rooms, are you prepared to go to the expense of installing same, in order to retain your Canada Select rating?”

<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>In Place</b>
2%	42%	56%

An appreciably large percentage of B&B operators are prepared to give up their current Canada Select rating or leave the rating program to avoid adding an amenity they believe their guests do not want. In fact, the atmosphere some B&Bs work to provide is predicated on an absence of television.

In response to the survey questions #10 and 11 and 12,

“Do you intend to retain your Star rating?”

<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Undecided</b>
62.5%	26.5%	11%

“And If so, do you plan on raising your rates to re-coup some of your costs?”

Yes	No	No Answer
20%	49%	31%

“Are there any perceived benefits to you in making the requested changes to your amenities other than retaining you star rating?”

Yes	No	No Answer
19%	62%	19%

B&B operators are prepared to give up their current Canada Select rating or leave the rating program to avoid adding what they see as unnecessary and/or costly amenities which they believe their guests do not want. Some of these guests would go elsewhere because of the few extra dollars these amenities would cost them; so the majority of B&B operators will not raise their rates to compensate for the extra expense but will either absorb it or leave the Canada Select program.

## E. Inspection Fairness, Breadth and Objectivity

### 1. Determining Star Ratings

#### a. Weight given to interior features from a fixed and dated list.

The Canada Select program, originally developed in the 1980s, has criteria which no longer define properties with one through five stars as they were originally meant to do (where roughly ☆=Acceptable; ☆☆=Good; ☆☆☆= Above Average; ☆☆☆☆= Excellent and ☆☆☆☆☆=Superior).

Weight is given to window treatments, ignoring windows of architectural significance or with stunning views that should not be blocked.

Weight is given to crown moldings when crown moldings might actually detract from the architecture or where equal significance might be given to vaulted or beamed ceilings or skylights.

Weight is given to wallpaper -- out of style in any home, with the possible exception of heritage properties -- which might be given to quality of artwork and wall hangings of artistic merit. In reality, how many fine art galleries display objets d’art on papered walls?

Some leeway should be given to properties of significant architectural merit, especially on the West Coast, when those features are not specifically listed in the Canada Select criteria list. An even better approach might be to list these typically west coast features in lieu of features of other eras (such as crown molding, hardwood floors and stained glass).

**b. Amenities in the new list of criteria include features that some travelers find uncomfortable, distracting, or even distasteful.**

A large proportion of the B&B travelers, as we have previously stated, primarily want peace and quiet in their accommodations ... along with various levels of amenities and luxurious extras, of course.

B&B proprietors should be permitted to choose from a “basket” of technological amenities (such as WiFi, DVD Player, in-room TVs, in-room phones) to earn their rating. It should be the responsibility of each B&B to clearly describe on its website any technological equipment it may have on the premises and whether this equipment is in the guest rooms or in a common area. The Canada Select site should substantiate this “basket” requirement with a phrase such as “Most ☆☆☆☆ accommodations have a selection of the following amenities and may not have all” and, as a rejoinder, should add, “Please check with your accommodations provider before you reserve if a particular amenity is a necessity of your stay”.

**c. Inspections do not always produce equal or equivalent results.**

It is deflating and causes mistrust of the system when a B&B operator, who has put every imaginable luxury into his or her property at costs of tens of thousands, finds other properties with drab and run-down interiors equally rated.

It is not appropriate to the Program’s purpose to overstate a rating. Re-inspections should be strict and where a reduction in rating would occur as a result of re-inspection, a time limit given for proprietors to reinstate their former quality.

Additionally, rural properties should be rated on the same basis as urban properties so that the travelling public experience no surprises. 4-star quality should be 4-star and 5-star quality should be 5-star.

**2. Rating hospitality and other aspects of the B&B experience.**

The level of host/guest interaction and host hospitality and the quality of the food offered are all factors in a guest’s enjoyment of a B&B property, yet there is no rating for these important aspects in the Canada Select program.

While it may not seem apparently ratable, hosting and breakfast quality – both essential to Bed & Breakfast guests -- could be judged based on a mail-in comment card asking the following questions:

- Did you feel welcomed?
- Were you given a satisfactory orientation to your space, the B&B, the neighbourhood?
- Did the hosts offer advice without being prompted?
- Was your stay comfortable?
- How would you rate the quality of the breakfast?
- Did you find all the amenities you expected?
- Would you return?

WCBBIA could make available a tabulation of its own comment card system. It asks guests to rate the following criteria: **H**ospitality; **R**oom Comfort & Amenities; **B**reakfast; **M**aintenance & Cleanliness; and **O**verall Impression.

## **Conclusion**

The Canada Select Program is seen by bed and breakfast owners in Western Canada as being reasonably effective within the current criteria and as a valuable tool for travelers in Canada: however, it is deemed to be deficient in several areas including communication lines to its stakeholders, consistency, and an understanding of the various products.

WCBBIA is of the opinion that the lumping together of the various segments of the hospitality industry on the part of the study's progenitors led to poorly formulated questions and a misinterpretation of the responses. Reliance on the survey interpretation and the recommendations of the consultants has led to rating requirements beyond the needs and desires of the consumers. Many B&Bs already exceed some of the new requirements by choice, but find the provision of others to be superfluous to the needs and desires of their particular clientele.

One possible effect of compliance with the new criteria enforcement, should it be pursued, would be the loss of a considerable number of Canada Select properties who will not accept a down-rating that would result from their refusal to accede to the demands. This is counter-productive to the Program in that it defeats the primary need of the Program to include all properties of merit and to expand its membership base, ensuring it to be the undisputed ratings standard for Canadian properties.

If the program elects, as a means of retaining numbers, to "grandfather" the rating of those properties now in the program it will further contribute to an already perceived sense of inspection inconsistency. Coupled with certain antiquated criteria retained in the Program, such action will ultimately reduce the number of properties and lessen the value of the rating system itself.

WCBBIA is very interested in being an agent to bring about satisfactory resolution to the dilemma of Canada Select criteria. We recommend (1) that the Canada Select program concentrate on the most important aspects of the consultants' recommendations regarding brand marketing and recognition-building; (2) that it develop an effective means by which the specific consumer requirements (i.e., Hospitality and Breakfast Quality) in the Bed & Breakfast segment of the Program may be judged and addressed; (3) that requirements for amenities related to technological equipment for the B&B segment be postponed for further study, or implemented as a "basket": approach, or be softened to common area requirements rather than in-room availability and (4) that future studies include all stakeholders, including the B&B sector, in the formative and subsequent stages.

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WCBBIA Canada Select Committee  
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For further information, contact:

Rex Davidson, Secretary  
604-986-7173  
davidson@helix.net

Lawrie Belliveau, Director  
250-497-1120  
grumpy@grumpysplace.com

Edward Davidson, Director  
250-383-5442  
binnars@telus.net

## WCBBIA's Satisfaction Survey

### CANADA SELECT'S NEW CRITERIA

#### BACKGROUND

The following survey was undertaken by the Western Canada B&B Innkeepers Association (WCBBIA) in response to member dissatisfaction with the new requirements for Canada Select properties, specifically B&B properties.

The compilation below summarizes the responses by some 64 B&Bs in British Columbia both within and without WCBBIA. The proportion of members and non-members is not germane to the results of the survey. The significance of these numbers is that there was a participation rate of 32%, an indicator that levels of concern are high.

The list of those invited to take part in the survey, comprising some 197 3-star and higher B&B properties, was compiled from the Canada Select web site (for specifically British Columbia) and from the 2005 BC Accommodation Guide.

Note: There were 10 properties surveyed who claimed never to have been made aware of any Canada Select upcoming criteria changes. (These were reported to Tourism BC as agents for Canada Select.)

#### TIME FRAME

The survey took place in the time frame of August 8<sup>th</sup> through 31<sup>st</sup>, 2005.

#### SURVEY CONTENT

The survey consisted of 14 questions. The responses are tabulated below.

QUESTION #1	YES	NO
Have you received the letter re the new Canada Select requirements?	64	10

QUESTION #2	3 STAR	3.5 STAR	4 STAR	4.5 STAR	5 STAR
What is your current Canada Select rating?		5	28	27	4

<b>QUESTION #3</b>						<b>N/A</b>	<b>In Place</b>
What was your reaction to the new requirements as listed below on a scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree)?	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>		
	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>				<b>Strongly Agree</b>		
New telephone requirements	<b>12</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>28</b>
New television requirements	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>36</b>
Dry-cleaning requirements (5 Star)	<b>1</b>		<b>2</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>60</b>	
Technology requirements (internet access) ( 4 & 5 Star)	<b>10</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>12</b>
Wake-up service (5 star)	<b>1</b>		<b>2</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>60</b>	

<b>QUESTION #4</b>	<b>ENHANCE</b>	<b>DETRACT</b>
Do you think these new requirements will enhance or detract from the qualities that make your B&B what it is?	<b>22</b>	<b>33</b>

<b>QUESTION #5</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
Do you currently offer TV connected to cable or satellite in your rooms?	<b>36</b>	<b>28</b>

<b>QUESTION #6</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
Do you believe that TV in the rooms themselves, compared to the common area, is something that your guests are looking for?	<b>36</b>	<b>28</b>

<b>QUESTION #7</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
Do you currently have telephones available in your guest rooms, as opposed to the common area?	<b>28</b>	<b>36</b>

<b>QUESTION #8</b>	<b>TRUST</b>	<b>BLOCK</b>	<b>MONITOR</b>
How do you currently monitor/control guest long distance telephone use?	<b>34</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>18</b>

<b>QUESTION #9</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>IN PLACE</b>
If you currently do not have TV with cable or satellite in the rooms, are you prepared to go to the expense of installing same, in order to retain your Canada Select rating?	<b>1</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>36</b>

<b>QUESTION #10</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>UNDECIDED</b>
Do you intend to retain your Star rating?	<b>40</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>7</b>

<b>QUESTION #11</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
If so, do you plan on raising your rates to re-coup some of your costs?	<b>13</b>	<b>31</b>

<b>QUESTION #12</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
Are there any perceived benefits to you in making the requested changes to your amenities other than retaining your star rating?	<b>12</b>	<b>40</b>

<b>QUESTION #13</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
Do you think the Canadian B&B industry should establish its own replacement rating criteria using breakfast plates or some other symbol?	<b>26</b>	<b>25</b>

<b>QUESTION #14</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>NOT AN ISSUE</b>
Are you in favour of the reclassification from B&B to B&B home as seen in the 2005 Accommodation Guide?	<b>21</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>11</b>