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## **John De Fries is the New President and CEO of the Hawai'i Tourism Authority**

**HONOLULU** – John De Fries has accepted the offer to become the Hawai'i Tourism Authority's new president and CEO. The HTA Board of Directors unanimously agreed during the August 27 board meeting to make an offer to De Fries. He will start on September 16.

"Hawai'i's pathway to economic recovery and enhanced community well-being will require unprecedented levels of focus, collaboration, cooperation, coordination, and unified executive leadership throughout all sectors. I am grateful to have been chosen to lead the Hawai'i Tourism Authority," De Fries said.

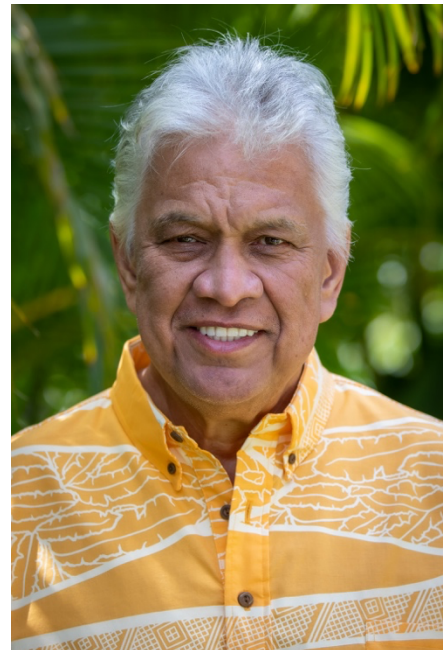
Born and raised in Waikīkī, now living in Kona on Hawai'i Island, De Fries was raised by family elders steeped in Hawaiian culture. He has more than 40 years of professional experience in the tourism and resort development industries. His recent visitor industry experience includes serving as executive director of the Native Hawaiian Hospitality Association. He is also president and principal advisor for Native Sun Business Group, a business consulting and project management firm focused on Hawai'i's hospitality and real estate development industries.

De Fries previously led the Department of Research and Development for the County of Hawai'i, a division responsible for stimulating economic growth in sectors including tourism, agriculture and renewable energy. Prior to that, he served as president and CEO of Hōkūli'a, a luxury residential community on Hawai'i Island.

De Fries serves as an advisor and board member to many organizations in the community, including the Julie Ann Wrigley Global Institute of Sustainability at Arizona State University, the Astronaut Ellison Onizuka Memorial Committee, Bishop Museum, Hawai'i Green Growth, Friends of the Future, the Keāhole Center for Sustainability, and Kualoa Ranch.

"Beset now by a global pandemic and economic collapse, Hawai'i faces a myriad of daunting challenges – among them, the reopening of our tourism industry, at a time when immense and growing anxiety can be felt in our local communities. The radiance of hope, however, is found in the resilience and creativity of Hawai'i's leaders in both the public and private sectors – the aunts, uncles, parents, kūpuna, youth, coaches, teachers, ministers, health care workers and essential workers who are diligently searching for solutions, for their communities," De Fries said.

In recent years, De Fries has been a part of rare gatherings in Hawai'i that highlight opportunities for leadership in sustainable living, human rights, and embracing native intelligence. He has engaged with His Holiness the Dalai Lama; members of the Rapid Evaluation Team from Google X; Gro Harlem Brundtland, the first female prime minister of Norway; Hina Jilani, a renowned



lawyer, pro-democracy campaigner, and a leading activist in Pakistan's women's movement; Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu of Cape Town, South Africa; and New Zealand's Sir Sidney Moko Mead, Ph.D., who created the country's first department of Māori Studies at Victoria University of Wellington.

"All of us at HTA are looking forward to having John take the helm of Hawai'i's visitor industry. I was pleased to see that he has already become involved with working on ways that we can safely reopen tourism while keeping COVID-19 under control," said HTA board chair Rick Fried.

HTA received more than 300 applications for the position. Honolulu-based executive search and staffing firm Bishop & Company assisted with the process. A committee of six HTA board members and three community members reviewed the qualifications of the applicants before narrowing the list down to a group of nine finalists for interviews. The full HTA board interviewed the final two candidates on August 27 when the meeting went into executive session.

De Fries is the first Native Hawaiian appointed as HTA's president and CEO.

Chris Tatum retired from his job as HTA president & CEO on August 31. Keith Regan, HTA's chief administrative officer, is serving as interim president & CEO.

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### **John De Fries Headshot**

[https://www.dropbox.com/sh/tvviycvf9bjt56l/AADxCJ96C7\\_OKVIQj7c98TZ-a?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/tvviycvf9bjt56l/AADxCJ96C7_OKVIQj7c98TZ-a?dl=0)

### **About the Hawai'i Tourism Authority**

The [Hawai'i Tourism Authority](#) is the State of Hawai'i agency responsible for strategically managing its support of the tourism industry. Established in 1998 to support Hawai'i's leading industry and largest employer, HTA continually strives to help ensure tourism's sustainability and the benefits it brings to residents and communities statewide. Follow updates about HTA on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#) (@HawaiiHTA).

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