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**Critic Searches for Truth in Tourism**

**AMY SMITH – The Chronicle Herald**

Business or Pleasure?

Liberal tourism critic Stephen McNeil said Nova Scotia should find out why visitors come to the province.

Provincial figures released last month showed 839,000 people visited Nova Scotia in the first six months of 2006, up seven per cent from the first half of 2005.

But Mr. McNeil said the province doesn't have a clear picture of how many of those people were tourists and how many were on work-related trips or Nova Scotians returning home from somewhere else.

Without knowing the reason for the visits, Mr. McNeil said it's impossible to determine whether Nova Scotia's tourism advertising is effective. Mr. McNeil said the way the government tracks visitors explains why some tourism operators say the provincial figures don't mesh with the drop in business they are experiencing. The Liberal suggested the province could do some random surveying at airports and other entry points to find out why people are coming here.

But Tourism spokeswoman Wendy Barnable said the province does that already. She said there are people who count the vehicles that enter the province by land and ferry, excluding those with Nova Scotia licence plates. She said staff members also ask folks arriving at the airports about their reason for travelling. And she said the province does a comprehensive visitor exit survey every four years. The last one was done in 2004 and surveyed more than 4,000 people.

Ms. Barnable said the department's figures show 47 per cent of people come to Nova Scotia for leisure, 31 per cent to visit friends and family and 11 per cent for business or convention.