

## COVID-19 UPDATE

Dear Colleagues

It is with great sadness that we mourn the loss of the many lives affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, in our industry and beyond. This pandemic has been the cause of many challenges and calamities that continue to taunt our industry as we face restrictions, once again.

The year 2020 was a challenging year for us as an industry and the situation continues to be critical, well into 2021. With this in mind, the Tourism Business Council of South Africa (TBCSA) would like to encourage all members to continue to follow the necessary protocols and practise the highest levels of hygiene to ensure that the industry is not regarded as a 'super-spreader' of the virus.

As you know, the TBCSA has been at the forefront of lobbying for the re-opening of the tourism sector since the onset of the pandemic. In our efforts, there were many setbacks that hindered our progress as a sector. Nonetheless, we managed to get the sector re-opened ahead of the date that was initially discussed.

Our sector continues to face several challenges exasperated by the extended lockdown announced by President Cyril Ramaphosa earlier this month. Our goal remains to ensure that the industry is opened FULLY and remains sustainable despite COVID-19.

## UIF (TERS)

The tourism industry is restricted by the current level 3 which prohibits people from visiting parks, dams, beaches, and other open spaces. These restrictions have put a burden on accommodations, activities, attractions, and the entire value chain of the tourism industry. To address this, the TBCSA has been engaging with the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) through the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC) to find a way forward on UIF funds for the industry. The outcome of our discussions is yet to be determined but we are hopeful that our efforts will lead to the provision of funds to the industry.

## Other relief programmes for the industry

The TBCSA has been having discussions with the Banking Association through NEDLAC to provide interventions that can alleviate the financial pressure on the industry, such as providing interest rate cuts, payment holidays, extension of payments and so on.

Furthermore, the TBCSA has called for the industry to be prioritised when it comes to the COVID-19 loan guarantee scheme. In particular, we have suggested that the tourism industry benefit from a ring-fenced fund within the COVID-19 loan guarantee scheme that will not prejudice the tourism industry based on its high-risk profile caused by inconsistent regulations imposed by the government. The TBCSA believes that the tourism industry must be dealt with separately from other sectors, with great consideration given to the current circumstances.

### **Opening up the industry under LEVEL 3 regulations**

Before the festive season began last year, the TBCSA had discussions with various departments about the possibility of using short term measures to prevent the rapid spread of COVID-19. Measures discussed included the closure of beaches and open spaces, early curfew as well as on and off-site liquor consumption to mitigate bed shortages in hospitals and further spread of COVID-19 during the festive season. The measures were implemented over the festive season as short-term measures. However, the President took a decision in January to extend the level 3 lockdown without adjusting the short-term measures (put in place specifically for the festive season) unilaterally. He did not consult with the TBCSA or other organisations representing labour or business.

Therefore, the TBCSA has pleaded with government and submitted supporting documents to the National Joint Operational and Intelligence Structure (NATJOINTS) to re-open open spaces such beaches; readjust the curfew and reinstate all water activities. We are waiting for further communication regarding our submissions. However, we remain hopeful that our submissions will be given due consideration and the sector will be reopened before 15 February 2021. The

TBCSA continues to urge government to re-open the sector to save thousands of jobs, livelihoods, and the industry at large.

### **Norms and Standards**

The department of tourism has released the “Norms and Standards” in relation to COVID-19. These norms and standards are aimed at ensuring that there is universal compliance across the value chain of tourism. It is important to note that the norms and standards seem to be derived from the protocol document that the TBCSA and its associations have put together and they don’t replace them but strengthen them.

The TBCSA COVID-19 Committee will put together a comprehensive document to input on the norms and standards before they are gazetted.

### **Tourism Policy Review**

Late last year, The Minister of Tourism, Mmamoloko Kubayi-Ngubane announced the advisory panel that will be reviewing the tourism policy to ensure alignment with the new developments within the tourism industry. The last tourism policy was done in 1995 and culminated in the tourism white paper that was published in 1996. We can all agree that there has been many technological, political, economic, and social developments since 1996 and these necessitate the review of policy.

The TBCSA will make a submission to the panel on our views with regards to the various aspects of policy to ensure full participation of private sector.

**ENDS.**



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