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## **Media statement by Minister of Tourism, Patricia de Lille, on oversight visit to Kruger National Park**

**Date: 12 July 2023**

As part of my oversight duties, today, I visited various sites within the Kruger National Park to inspect investment projects by the Department of Tourism and the private sector at this world renowned, top tourist attraction in South Africa.

With our vast natural beauty and wildlife, the Kruger National Park (KNP) is a must-see attraction on the bucket lists of travellers from all over the world and the country. As with all tourist attractions, it is vital that this attraction is maintained to provide tourists with a world class and authentically South African experience.

Tourism is an important sector in the country's economy due to South Africa's attractiveness to travellers and the many jobs created by this vibrant sector. In order to grow the economic contribution of tourism even further, we need to work harder on all fronts, with government, communities and the private sector working hand in hand, to grow our tourism offering and attract more tourists to South Africa from all over the world.

As we aim to continue attracting more tourists to South Africa, continued investment and maintenance of tourist attractions is of strategic importance and this can only be achieved by government, communities and the private sector working together. This partnership has been demonstrated in a number of projects within the KNP.

### **KRUGER NATIONAL PARK OPERATIONS**

One of the first stops during my oversight visit to the KNP today was to receive a briefing from the SANParks management on general tourism activities, growth and trends.

I wanted to hear first-hand what is working well, what's new, what obstacles are preventing growth and how the Department of Tourism and other government departments can assist the SANParks management to optimise operations at the KNP.

The purpose of my oversight visit was to hear how the KNP and all spheres of government can work together to enhance tourism's performance to achieve greater progress on the key priorities for tourism given to me by President Cyril Ramaphosa.

The priorities include: tour operator licenses, e-visas, tourism safety, the Tourism Equity Fund, tourism infrastructure development, increasing the volume and value of domestic and international tourism and

the Tourism Sector Master Plan all aimed at increasing demand for tourism to South Africa and increasing the number of domestic and international tourists visiting our country.

It is well known that unfortunately there have been many crime incidents in and around the Kruger with criminals attacking tourists and this is a matter that we take very seriously, not only because we want to safeguard tourists, but we cannot have criminality stand in the way of our tourist attractions thriving because that is how we can ultimately create more jobs for our people and bring prosperity for all.

I received a briefing from the SANParks Management on general tourism activities and safety matters and committed that I would do everything in my power, together with the Department, provincial and local government to work with the private sector and communities to enhance safety in and around the KNP.

On 29 May 2023, I held a National Tourism Safety meeting with all MECs for Tourism and the private sector on actions we can take to enhance tourism safety and how we can communicate these safety measures world-wide so that would-be travellers can be converted to tourists who decide to visit South Africa.

The Department of Tourism is finalising a refined training curriculum for Tourism Monitors and we are set to deploy more than 2 200 Tourism Monitors to key tourist attractions and hotspot areas across the country in coming months.

The Department of Tourism has budgeted R174 million for the Tourism Monitors programme to improve safety around the 59 tourism hotspot areas identified by the National Tourism Safety Forum.

Of the more than 2 200 Tourism Monitors that will be deployed to tourism hotspots, 350 Tourism Monitors will be deployed to SANParks establishments with 100 of the 350 Tourism Monitors to be deployed to the KNP.

We are committed to doing all we can to enhance tourism investment, tourism safety and attract more tourists to our beautiful country with all stakeholders and we will work to find and action solutions to anything that stands in the way of that objective to grow tourism's contribution to the country's economy as espoused in the country's Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan (ERRP).

## **SOLAR PV PROJECTS BY THE DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM:**

One of the key projects to address climate change and water and electricity constraints in the country and a project I am very proud of is the Department's Green Tourism Incentive Programme (GTIP).

The GTIP sees the department co-funding energy and water retrofitting projects at privately owned tourism establishments to facilitate more sustainable operations and uninterrupted visitor experiences.

To date the department has opened eight GTIP application windows, with the most recent application window closing on 30 June 2023.

While applications received during the eight application window are currently being processed, the previous seven application windows of the GTIP already yielded 130 approved applications with a total grant value of R76.1 million disbursed by the department for installation of energy and water saving measures at tourism establishments across the country.

Prior to the full-scale roll out of the GTIP programme, the Department of Tourism retrofitted eight state-owned tourist attractions with solar Photovoltaic (PV) installations. These sites included Robben Island, three National Botanical Gardens in the Western Cape, Free State and Northern Cape as well as four sites in Kruger National Park in Mpumalanga. This project informed and paved the way for the establishment of the GTIP.

The cost of retrofitting all eight attractions amounted to R98.5 million for a combined total of 2.7 MegaWatt (Mw) of installed renewable energy generating capacity. Combined savings for all eight sites is estimated to be just below R40 million by the end of the 2022/23 financial year.

The project sites selected in the KNP for implementation of solar PV energy generating systems included two rest camps (Skukuza and Lower Sabie) with existing electricity supply from the national Eskom grid (grid-connected sites) and two more-remote picnic sites (Tshokwane and Nkuhlu) that were originally reliant on diesel generators (off-grid sites).

The combined energy generating capacity installed on all four projects sites in the KNP amounts to 1.9 MWp (Mega Watt peak), which was developed at a combined total cost of R64.18 million. The cumulative savings since early 2018 is estimated at around R21 million for the four sites retrofitted with solar PV systems in the KNP.

I visited the Solar PV installation the Skukuza Rest Camp, one of the sites which benefitted from an investment of R21.5 million by the Department of Tourism.

At the Skukuza main rest camp, the installation comprises a solar PV array with 2 640 PV modules and 33 inverters that connects directly into the KNP electricity grid at the nearby Eskom sub-station. The system has an installed capacity of 844.8kWp (kilowatt peak), and provides approximately one quarter of the daytime electricity demand for the entire Skukuza rest camp and administrative operations.

Since commissioning at the end of May 2018, the system has reduced Skukuza's electricity bill with an average of R136 000 per month, which translates to a saving of more than R8 million over the past five years.



**Above Picture: Solar PV installation at Skukuza Rest Camp. Credit: SANParks**

I also visited the solar PV installation at the Nkuhlu picnic site which replaced the original diesel generation system. The solar PV array has been fitted on an elevated structure that also serves as shaded parking for tourist cars and open-top safari vehicles.

The system comprises 402 solar PV panels and 14 inverters with an installed capacity of 130kWp together with a 300kWp containerised battery storage facility to provide sufficient daytime and night time energy for the all operations (shop and basic tourist facilities) at Nkuhlu picnic site.

The total cost of the Nkuhlu solar PV and battery system was R8.3million and since commissioning in March 2018, the solar PV system has saved the Nkuhlu picnic site an average of 1 675 litres of diesel per month (20 000 litres per annum), which translates into a total estimated saving of R1.5 million for KNP over the past 5 years.



**Nkuhlu solar PV plant (Photo: SANParks)**



**Lower Sabie solar PV plant (Photo: SANParks)**



**Above Picture: Tshokwane solar PV plant (Photo: SANParks)**

### **Investment Facilitation Initiatives**

The Department of Tourism manages a Pipeline of Nationally Prioritised Tourism Investment Projects focusing on projects located in underdeveloped areas with high tourism potential around major attractions such as the National Parks, World Heritage Sites, Coastal Areas and Inland Waterways.

The Department's Investment Promotion, Facilitation, Aftercare and project preparation/packaging efforts focus mainly on private sector-led projects, in order to drive investment into the tourism sector.

Around the Orpen and the Skukuza gates of the KNP, the Tourism Investment Coordination Directorate is facilitating several high-impact projects: New Airport Terminal at the Eastgate Airport (Hoedspruit Military Base), SleepOver Motel Orpen Gate, The Orpen Kruger Lodge (formerly known as Mnisi Resort), Kruger Shalati - The Train on the Bridge (Skukuza), SleepOver Kruger Gate (Skukuza).

These investment interventions took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, amounting to more than R200 million worth of private sector investment.

The unblocking of regulatory barriers such as long-term leases, finding equity for tourism projects and critical infrastructure could unlock further investments.

### **Eastgate Airport (Hoedspruit Military Base)**

The investors at the Eastgate Airport took advantage of the decline in demand during the Covid-19 induced lockdown to embark on an extensive upgrade of the Airport worth millions, which included: revamping of the airport terminal, new office block for car rental companies, revamp of the gate and parking area.

Eastgate Airport is one of the strategic projects that are critical to the sustainability of the KNP as a major tourist attraction, addressing the issue of air access.

## **SleepOver Motels**

SleepOver Motels model was conceptualised by the private sector and opened its doors in November 2019.

The SleepOver Motels Concept is a low-cost motel accommodation to budget conscious travelers at strategic sites on owned or leased land along main road routes, near major attractions and urban centres/semi-industrial areas.

All SleepOver Motels opened during the Covid-19 pandemic (except one in Gauteng) translating to more than R100 million investment in the economy and creating about 10 jobs per establishment.

The following five establishments are in Mpumalanga, along the KNP:

- Orpen Gate
- Kruger Gate
- Kruger Mpumalanga International Airport
- Komatipoort
- Phabeni Gate

The Department was also instrumental in unblocking challenges related to land use/zoning for SleepOver Motels near Beitbridge by facilitating access to the relevant officials in Limpopo Province who assisted in resolving the barriers.

The SleepOver Motels has a strong community beneficiation element with most of the motels owned by local entrepreneurs. It's an affordable low-cost franchise model that attracts broad-based franchise investors with low risks and higher returns.

## **Skukuza Golf Course**

The Golf Course is operated by Indalo Hotels & Leisure on a 20-year lease with SANParks. Indalo is a significant role-player around the KNP that has plans to inject more funding into projects in and around the KNP. At the Skukuza Golf Course, a new club house was built after the approval of a long-term lease by SANParks.

The Group also plans to make multi-million rand investments on refurbishments to a critical project near Phalaborwa Gate of the KNP.

The visit to the Kruger National Park was informative and insightful and demonstrated the value of government, communities and the private sector working together to unlock investment opportunities that will grow tourism activities and jobs in the sector even more.

We will continue to engage all stakeholders to address any obstacles preventing growth of this important sector.

**NOTE: High resolution pictures of the solar PV installations are available on request to [szwane@tourism.gov.za](mailto:szwane@tourism.gov.za) and [znicholson@tourism.gov.za](mailto:znicholson@tourism.gov.za)**

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