



Private Bag X424, Pretoria, 0001, South Africa. Tel. (+27 12) 444 6780, Fax (+27 12) 444 7027  
Private Bag X9154, Cape Town, 8000, South Africa. Tel. (+27 21) 469 5800, Fax: (+27 21) 465 3216

## **MEDIA STATEMENT BY MINISTER OF TOURISM, PATRICIA DE LILLE, MP**

**DATE: 7 July 2023**

### **RESOLUTION FROM MINISTER OF TRANSPORT TO STOP UNDULY PENALISING TOUR OPERATORS A WELCOMED RELIEF FOR TOUR OPERATORS**

Following in-depth engagements with the private sector and the Departments of Transport and Tourism, I welcome the move by the Minister of Transport, Sindisiwe Chikunga for law enforcement to stop unduly penalising tour operators who have applied for licence renewals and are still awaiting their renewed licences from the Department of Transport.

The National Department of Transport, through its National Public Transport Regulator Committee (NPTR), is responsible for issuing and renewing tour operator licences and last year a backlog on applications had a severe negative impact on the tour operators across the country.

The Department of Tourism engaged the Department of Transport on the matter since last year and I also met with Minister Chikunga to resolve this matter in May 2023. We agreed that the Minister of Transport would send a letter to all MECs for Transport for law enforcement officers to stop unduly penalising tour operators who are awaiting their licence renewal application decisions.

The Department of Transport adjudicated 1 432 applications for tour operating licenses and the backlog was cleared last year.

However, out of the 1 174 approved applications, only 636 operating licenses were uplifted/collected by tour operators. To remedy the slow upliftment and to foster relations between the industry and the NPTR, the Department of Transport embarked on collaborative workshops with the Tourism Business Council of South Africa (TBCSA) in the key provinces of Gauteng, Western Cape and Kwa Zulu-Natal. The solution-oriented roadshows created a platform for operators to engage directly with the NPTR to have their long-standing licensing issues resolved.

In addition, to resolve challenges within the tour operator licence process, a decision was taken in a recent MINMEC (Ministry of Transport and Transport MECs meeting) to implore their respective law enforcement officers to correctly interpret Regulation 25(2) of the National Land Transport Regulations and desist from the inconvenience resulting from impounding vehicles whose operators have rightfully applied for renewals.

The Department of Transport has acknowledged the critical role of tourism in the country's economy and has committed to continuing with the collaborative engagements between the NPTR, the industry and sector departments to improve regulatory and administrative practices in the operating license processes.

In June Minister Chikunga signed and sent a letter to all MECs to give effect to the decision of the MINMEC. The resolution states:

“To give permission to tour operators, who have applied for licence renewals 30 days before the expiry of their licence and had not received a notice to uplift, to continue operating with a copy of their expired licence and proof of their application for a licence renewal until their new licence is issued.”

Furthermore, the letter from the Minister of Transport to Transport MECs also states that an operator who complies with this regulation, may not be unduly penalised.

The Minister's letter and matter of tour operators being unduly penalised stems from challenges with processing licence applications and collection of licence renewals and the inconsistency in the interpretation of NLTA Regulation 25(2) by law enforcement officers which led to the impounding of mostly tourism vehicles whose owners/operators had properly applied for renewal of their operating licences.

The resolution sent to all MECs in writing will be a welcomed relief to tour operators who have applied in time for licence renewals and are waiting for their renewed licences to be issued by the Department of Transport.

The penalising and impoundment of tour operator vehicles dealt a heavy blow to the industry and through the collective efforts of government and the private sector, namely the Tourism Business Council of South Africa (TBCSA) and the Southern Africa Tourism Services Association (SATSA), we have been able to resolve this matter. The Department of Tourism will continue working with the Department of Transport and all role-players to continue reducing red tape and creating an ease of doing business for the tourism sector to allow the sector to grow and contribute even more to the country's economy.

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Issued by: Zara Nicholson Media Liaison Officer to Minister Patricia de Lille, MP

Cell: +27 (0) 79 416 5996

Email: [znicholson@tourism.gov.za](mailto:znicholson@tourism.gov.za)