

REMARKS BY THE MEC FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND TOURISM, MRS YN PHOSA, DURING A MEETING WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF THE KRUGER LOWVELD TOURISM AT TOURISM *INDABA* IN DURBAN, KZN.

Tuesday, 25 June 2013

It is my pleasure to welcome you to this meeting which you requested, to come and sort out some issues in order to strengthen our partnership. We really appreciate this partnership, and trust that your intentions are meant to improve the industry which is quite crucial towards economic development.

I have brought along a team from the Department and the *MTPA*, led by the Head of Department, Dr Vusanani Dlamini, the Deputy Chairperson of the *MTPA* Board, Ms Clara Ndlovu, *MTPA* Board Member, Mr Elliot Ndala, and the CEO, Mr Jacques Modipane, to show you that we really that you serious as a partner in tourism growth and development in the province.

As a province, we are taking this sector very serious and that is why we have identified and prioritised tourism in our economic growth and development blue-print, the *MEGDP* (Mpumalanga Economic Growth and Development Path), as one of the sectors with a huge potential to create the much needed job opportunities.

At the level of the Department, we have elevated tourism to be a stand-alone Programme in order to give it special attention. We have also provided additional funding to the *MTPA* in our budget for 2013-2014 to strengthen our marketing campaigns.

The Board of the *MTPA* has started embarking on a number of road-shows to resuscitate and strengthen relations with the three (3) Regional Tourism Organisations (RTOs) in the province. The plan was to start in Gert Sibande on the 26<sup>th</sup> of May 2013, and continuing in the other (2) districts.

As government, we are also concerned about the slow transformation of the sector. It appears some of us (operators) are still reluctant to heed this call. Indications are that the sector continues to be dominated by our white counterpart.

I hope you will understand me correctly, and not think that we are playing race-card. We are just imploring on you to assist us in transforming this sector as articulated in the Tourism BEE Scorecard. As pioneers with a spirit to lead the way, we are however confident of your commitment towards achieving this goal. It is only possible when both government and the tourism industry in the province can pull together in the same direction.

The safety of tourism remains our top priority, and this was also raised by the Honourable Premier during the *State of the Province Address* this year. As government we have so far deployed 520 tourism safety monitors at strategic points across the province. Over 138 of them have been deployed in the Ehlanzeni District and distributed as follows:

- Pilgrim's Rest – 10
- Graskop – 10
- Mashishing – 16
- Burke Lurk's Potholes – 16
- Hazyview – 28
- Nelspruit – 64

It is our intention to continue to strengthen our support in this area to guarantee the safety of tourists. We really need to push up numbers in relation to domestic arrivals.

We acknowledge that the *MTPA* has experienced some challenges owing to budgetary constraints, but as I indicated earlier on, we have started to correct this situation in the current financial year. More funding has been allocated to the *MTPA* to alleviate the challenges experienced in the past. This will therefore enable the agency to provide marketing material, and participate in future tourism trade shows like the *Tourism Indaba*.

We will also address the challenge of decaying tourism sites under the control of the *MTPA* during this financial year. To address this, we have allocated a total amount of R44 million as a special grant for the refurbishment of four (4) priority nature reserves, namely, Blyde River Canyon, Songimvelo, Loskopdam and Manyeleti. However we should mention that all other nature reserves requiring refurbishment will be attended to moving forward.

Let me also take this opportunity to invite you to the tabling of our *Policy and Budget Speech* on **28 May 2013 at 14H30** at the Provincial Legislature, where we will provide more details on how we intent improving tourism in the province, amongst others.

Like I indicated in the beginning, we really appreciate your eagerness to contribute towards improving the tourism sector.

***Working together we can do more*** to grow our economy for the benefit of our people.

I now have the pleasure to give you an opportunity to present to us your partnership plan – how we can work together to improve the sector in the Ehlanzeni District. Maybe we could learn from your wisdom and reciprocate this plan in the other two (2) districts.