



destea

department of
economic, small business development,
tourism and environmental affairs
FREE STATE PROVINCE

**SPEAKING NOTES FOR
MEC MAKALO MOHALE
ON THE OCCASION OF THE VISIT OF DEPUTY
MINISTER OF TOURISM TO THABO MOFUTSANAYANE**

Date: 16 October 2020

Venue; Uniondale Game farm Paul Roux

Time: 10:00

Programme Director

Deputy Minister Fish Mahlalela

Deputy Minister Nokuzola Capa

Executive Mayor Malefu Vilakazi

All Mayors and Councilors present

Tourism stakeholders

SMMEs present here

Members of the media and

**Public servants from National Departments, Provincial Department and the entity
as well as officials from District and local Municipalities.**

Our gathering today comes exactly seven (7) months after the declaration of the State of Disaster Management on the 15th of March 2020 and the commencement of the lockdown on the 26th March 2020. This lockdown affected our economy negatively with the tourism sector the worst affected largely because it relies on the movement of people. Many businesses in this sector literally shut down their doors and send workers home.

The relaxation of the lockdown rules since level three has given the sector a glimmer of hope which requires all stakeholders working together to ensure that the process of picking up the pieces starts in earnest. Thabo Mofutsanyane is endowed with natural beauty and is considered the Jewel of South African Tourism waiting to be discovered.

From the Sentinel in the Drakensberg Mountain, Wetsie's Cave, Basotho Cultural Village Branwag and SanParks in Goldengate, Clarence, Sterkfontein Nature Reserve and Seekoeivlei in the northern border with Kwazulu Natal and Mpumalanga, Thabo Mofutsanyana remains a paradise for nature lovers and outdoor adventurers.

Deputy Minister, your decision to visit the Free State, particularly Thabo Mofutsanyana District is a welcomed encouragement to take action in order to get this area to its pre covid-19 levels in tourism activities. We appreciate the partnership with the Tourism Ministry to embark on a Rural Tourism Development and Domestic Tourism Campaign, to coordinate efforts of ensuring that all three spheres of government prioritize Rural Tourism Infrastructure, Development and Promotion in their plans such as IDPs and related sector plans. This way we believe we will be an opportunity to shake off the long lockdown blues and get out of the hibernation and begin to travel, experience what our province has to offer.

Honoured guests, last month we celebrated tourism month which is intended to promote our areas as tourism destinations of choice. Due to uncertainties as a results of concerns with the spread of the virus, our tourism plan this year was largely virtual and on line. Part of our plan is to ensure that tourism products and attractions in the province are marketed and promoted. Deputy Minister Thabo Mofutsanayana District is the home of Eagle Route which is part of our Big Five Tourism Routes in the Free State. This route is also part of Maloti Drakensbreg Transfonteir Programme (MDTP) which consists of Kwazulu Natal, Eastern Cape and Lesotho. The programme aims to promote inter-provincial and inter-agency cooperation and consultations for sustainable, responsible tourism development and promotional activities in this route. This is a typical intergovernmental relations approach which requires our support in the best interest of this area.

Whilst speaking about working Intergovernmental Relations which should benefit the tourism industry, I would like to emphasize the need to resuscitate Provincial Tourism

Council (PTC) The purpose of the PTC is to create a platform for relevant structures in the tourism value chain to provide for the systematic and integrated planning, development, promotion, implementation, infrastructural development, evaluation and monitoring of tourism in the province.

Through this platform we will be able to

- improved and effective inter-governmental coordination
- harness full potential of expertise and strength of the tourism for competitive advantage
- co-ordinate the formulation of the provincial tourism policy with municipalities
- assist municipalities to develop municipal tourism policies within the framework of national and provincial tourism policies and legislation
- formulate methods and processes to evaluate the implementation of provincial tourism policy at municipality level and
- joint resource allocation, ensuring effective and efficient use of limited resources
- facilitation of increasing public and private sector investment in our industry

As part of our resolve to get this sector moving, we continue to improve our communication with the sector. This will ensure that our transformation agenda in this sector remains on track. Following the devastating impact of the sector by the pandemic, we plan to hold an indaba with the role-players in an effort to consolidate plans. The development of the Tourism Master Plan is also in an advance stage. This plan will now have to include lessons learned from the impact of the pandemic. The overall framework and objectives have already been tabled in the Provincial Tourism Forum held earlier this year.

Honourable Deputy Minister, our budget for tourism Development and Marketing is far from being adequate. In 2019/20 Financial year we allocated **R10 088 Million** and in the current financial year we have allocated **R 9 497 million**. Despite this constraints, we

continue to support some of the tourism activities in the Eagle Route, these include the Bethlehem Air Show here in Dihlabeng, Hiking Extravaganza in Dihlabeng which included guests from countries such as Lesotho and Botswana, Tourist Guides in the district, Dipontso event in Maluti A Phofung, Youth Flea Market, the Cherry Festival in Setsoto and we once hosted Lilizela Awards here in Dihlabeng. It also worth noting that some of previous Lilizela national winners from the Free State come from this district. We can also indicate that the recent MEC's Award at Lilizela Awards went to Mr. Rantseke who is a tour guide from this district and was also afforded an opportunity by our department to promote his services in Turkey early this year.

Furthermore, the Eagle Route is an integral part of the partnership between DESTEA and Department of Tourism in rolling out various programmes such as Service Excellence Awareness Programmes, Tourism Investment Workshops, Social Responsibility Initiative (SRI) monitoring, Tourism Capacity Building Programme, Tourism Resources Efficiency Programme and others. We continue to include tourism product owners from this area in the department's market access programme such as Africa's Travel Indaba and EMITT Exhibition Conference in Turkey where some of the tourism enterprises from this district had the opportunity to promote their offerings at these exhibition platforms.

In the true spirit of corporative governance, we urge municipalities to scan their tourism environment and package their tourism basket in a way that together with national and provincial governments, we could look for investment's that will change the tourism landscape in this area to also allow new entrants in the sector.

Deputy Minister Capa, we are equally delighted that you also saw it fit to visit this area in order to check firsthand the challenges facing our SMMEs. The sector was also brought to its knees by the lockdown. In realizing than many small businesses in our township will not survive the pressures that go with pandemic, we developed Economic Recovery Incentives. We can announce that a little less than 3000 enterprises applied and some have already received assistance. Because, we did not want to leave anyone out, the process of processing and finalizing applications took much longer than we anticipated.

Our Township Revitalization programme is gaining momentum. Working with other law enforcement agencies, our consumer education programme continues to identify many bad business practices that affect our people negatively. We would like to make a call to municipalities to enforce the bylaws so that we can fix the township economy and ensure that the local economy is in the hands of the locals.

Let me at this point make a plea to municipalities and particularly councilors. Covi-19 is still with us and according to scientists, we have to resign ourselves that it will be with us for some time. There are legitimate concerns that we might be revisited by the second wave. What we are noticing at places of entertainment like, taverns, chisanyama and car washes is worrying. People violate safety and preventative measures, by ignoring to observe social distancing, not wearing mask and all hygiene requirements. These places are becoming the Covid-19 Hotspots.

In conclusion Deputy Minister, we take this opportunity to reiterate our commitment to prioritizing and promoting tourism. We embrace tourism as a sector that can create jobs and grow the provincial economy and acknowledge its multiplier effect in the economy. We strongly believe that collectively as the three spheres of government, we need to intensify our efforts to recover the sector in order to ensure that both the domestic and international tourists rediscover and explore the Free State.

I thank you.