

Tourism Act "inert and inflexible" says minister

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13 Feb 2013

The tourism sector had been plagued by "inadequate, unco-ordinated and fragmented" planning, Tourism Minister Marthinus Van Schalkwyk said in Parliament on Tuesday (12 February) when motivating the Tourism Bill during a workshop of the tourism committee.



Image: GCS

The bill will repeal the Tourism Act of 1993 (as amended in 1996, 2000 and 2002) which Van Schalkwyk said had failed to provide an over-arching national legislative framework for the management of tourism and did not support the implementation of the 1996 Tourism White Paper.

He said the act was "inert and inflexible" and unable to respond to the ever-changing landscape of the sector, identified as one of the six major job drivers in the National Development Plan, adopted by Cabinet last year.

Government's national tourism strategy envisages SA being one of the top 20 travel destinations in the world by 2020. Provincial and local government as well as the private sector have been consulted about the proposed changes.

The minister said the main aim of the bill was to provide for the development and promotion of sustainable tourism, *inter alia* by providing for effective marketing both locally and abroad and for the promotion of quality tourism products and services.

It would also provide for "effective intergovernmental relations" in developing and managing tourism. Already, Treasury has approved a standardised budget structure for provincial tourism departments as a prelude to the implementation of the bill.

The bill provides for the establishment of a Conventions Bureau by South African Tourism to co-ordinate bids for business events. It will also establish the Tourism Grading Council as a statutory entity responsible for quality assurance of tourism products, facilities and services. The council will implement the grading system which will be determined by the minister and

which has been transformed to conform with international best practice.

The bill provides for the voluntary submission of information by tourism businesses and for incentives for those that participate. Also, it provides for the issuing of norms and standards to standardise the management and development of tourism and for service excellence and for the determination of codes of good practice, which will serve as guidelines.

For the first time, provision is made for tourism protection, including a mechanism for the management of complaints and for self regulation by the industry. A Tourism Protector will act as a conduit for the referral of tourist complaints to relevant authorities and to accredited private-sector schemes for resolution.

A National Registrar of Tourist Guides will be established to maintain a central database of guides and prepare a code of conduct and ethics for them. There will also be provincial registrars. Guides will have to be registered and meet standards of competence laid down by the South African Qualifications Authority.

"This bill serves as the essence of the effective legislative framework required for the drafting of policies and strategies that will enhance the performance of the tourism sector for decades to come," Van Schalkwyk said.

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