

Airlines not giving passengers enough compensation

The SA airline industry is not giving passengers adequate compensation in terms of the Consumer Protection Act, says National Consumer Commissioner Mamodupi Mohlala.

By Paul Vecchiato ^{26 Jan 2012}

Addressing Parliament's Portfolio Committee on Trade & Industry earlier this week, Mohlala said: "Air transportation consumers forfeit money when they miss a flight when it is not necessarily their fault such as poor health and they are not given any recourse as stipulated in the CPA."

She said the Consumer Commission was in discussions with the airline industry over this matter and that a study had been done into the issue.

Mohlala asserted that terms and conditions of the local airline industry were not compliant with the law as they were weighted against the passengers.

"We find that the airlines do not give adequate compensation, when a flight is delayed or cancelled, to notify family, or an email service," she said.

Mohlala said that while the Consumer Commission had not received a large number of complaints about the local airline industry, it had decided to look into the issue due to the amount of money that was involved.

Low cost... Not necessarily low cost to the passengers

"We have found that some people have literally lost hundreds and thousands of rand because they were unable to go overseas because they had fallen ill," she said.

Mohlala said the CPA had specific provisions that when a passenger fell ill and could prove it, or cancelled an advance booking timeously then they were entitled to a full refund, but the airlines were not doing this.

The Consumer Commission had also found that the local airline industry was not offering adequate compensation for lost baggage.

"If they had to compensate (for lost baggage) on a case-by-case basis it may cost the airlines a lot of money. However, if they had to come up with an industry-wide compensation policy, then maybe not so much," Mohlala said.

Mohlala also made the point that a "low cost airline" did not necessarily mean cheaper tickets.

"When an airline says it is low cost, it means that its overheads were lower than others and not that its tickets cost less. Sometimes one can find cheaper tickets on legacy airlines. Airlines should make their passengers aware of this," she said.