



01 Dr Lategan Road, Block C, SABS Campus, Groenkloof, Pretoria. Tel: 012 428 7762, Email:

Mphathi wehlelo, Ms Palesa Phali

MEC Ravi Pillay,

Acting Judge President of the High Court of South Africa; Mr Justice Isaac Madondo

Provincial Commissioners Office- SAPS, Lt. Gen. Mkhwanazi

Head State Attorney: Department of Justice, Ms N. E. Peete

The Provincial Head Department of Home Affairs, Mr M Modiba

The Provincial Head Department of Labour, Mr E Khambule

Chairperson of the Consumer Tribunal KZN, Prof. B Dumisa

Regional Director-Legal Resource Centre, Ms S Samuel

Acting Exe. Manager at NERSA, Ms F Harris

It was President John F Kennedy's special message to the US Congress which inspired the idea of World Consumer Rights Day. The message to the US Congress was sent by him on March 15, 1962, setting the wheels of Consumer Protection rolling.

The protection of South African consumers is the mainstay of the consumer protection regulators . WCRD is celebrated globally on this day to remind consumers of their basic rights, while ensuring that suppliers comply with the law. It is for this reason that during this period, consumer protection entities, under the umbrella of the Consumer Protection Forum chose to celebrate this important day under the theme: Sustainable Consumption. From yesterday's colloquium, it was clear that regulators in the consumer protection space need to work harder to nudge consumers towards sustainable consumption, thus fostering a change in behaviour. This year MEC and honourable guests, we are asking each and every one of us to be mindful of what we buy, consume and how we dispose of the remnants and packaging thereafter. **Each time you buy, consume and discard, ask yourself: Is it safe for you and the environment?**

Each year brings different challenges in the consumer protection space.

It has always been our view, as it is our mandate that no consumer should be subjected to unfair and unconscionable practices from unscrupulous suppliers. It was for this reason that consumer protection bodies united and formed a Consumer Protection Forum (CPF).

ABOUT THE CPF MEMBERS

The CPF is a voluntary body of regulators in the consumer protection space and its purpose is to establish a platform in terms of which the NCC; Provincial Consumer Protection Authorities and National Regulatory Authorities within consumer protection environment are able to consult,

cooperate, seek counsel and engender a coordinated and consistent approach in the protection of interests and welfare of consumers through co-ordinated strategies, agreements and other interventions. Members of CPF are the National Regulator for Compulsory Specifications (NRCS), Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA), National Credit Regulator (NCR), Council for Medical Aid Schemes (CMS), Financial Sector Conduct Authority (FSCA), Energy Regulator of South Africa (NERSA), Provincial Consumer Protection Offices, Consumer Goods and services Ombud Scheme (CGSO), Motor Industry Ombud Scheme of South Africa (MIOSA).

Fundamental Consumer Rights and Consumer Protection in SA

MEC, honourable guests, it is gatherings like this one that will ensure that we remind ourselves of our role in the consumer protection space. We are dealing with unscrupulous and bogus suppliers whose sole intention is to prey on unsuspecting consumers and swindle them of their hard earned cash. Over the past 11 months, the NCC alone received about 3000 complaints from KwaZulu-Natal, placing the province third with most complaints. The most complained about industries included the motor industry, retails and telecommunications.

During the hard lockdown, we experienced an influx of complaints against suppliers who were increasing prices of goods and services unfairly. It is during this period again where we experience a surge in the number of pyramid schemes. While pyramids (also known as Amabhanoyi) and other related schemes are big in the province of KwaZulu-Natal MEC, there

seems to be little or no complaints from this province. We still need to tighten our consumer education in this regard. We need to work together to protect consumers against themselves. Pyramid schemes are not investment vehicles, they are not sustainable, they are illegal. It therefore makes it an offence to operate, join, promote or recruit others into a pyramid scheme. The CPA requires that both the suppliers and consumers are **HONEST WITH THEIR DEALINGS.**

We still get complaints about suppliers who still advertise products as being available at a specified price, misleading consumers in relation to the availability of those goods, thus engaging in bait marketing. I want to remind those suppliers that they are depriving consumers their right to **FAIR AND RESPONSIBLE MARKETING**

Our visit to inspect compliance at Freight Station-at the Bay Head has confirmed that a lot still needs to be done to protect the consumers in South Africa in relation to clothing, textile and leather goods; purely to ensure that these suppliers adhere to labelling requirements. The most critical area is to ensure that clothing, textiles, leather and related components that are imported into the country are compliant. Consumers have the right to proper labelling that includes the fibre content, care labelling and country of origin, so that they can make an informed choice when buying. Your Consumer Rights are important and cannot be interfered with or ignored by any supplier. If you have purchased a good and needed to return it either because it was defective, is not fit for purpose it was intended or did not meet your expectations (especially online items), you can exercise your **RIGHT TO RETURN** and get redress.

Most of us in this room, probably on more than one occasion have complained to a store manager, hotel manager or someone in charge either because we were not happy with a product purchased or a service rendered. You have exercised YOUR RIGHT TO BE HEARD. When it comes to consumer rights, you are the first line of defence.

The role of Consumer Protection Bodies

MEC, the reason for the establishment of the CPF was to ensure that consumers are heard and receive appropriate redress. The promulgation of the CPA laid the foundation for cooperative governance and the establishment of a co-ordinating structure as envisaged by:

- Section 83 (1) (a) of the CPA; “to co-ordinate and harmonise the functions to be performed by one or more provincial consumer authorities...”;
- Section 83(3)(a) “may engage with a provincial consumer protection authority in cooperative activities of research, publication, education, staff development and training;
- Section 83(4), “at the request of the relevant MEC of a province, or a provincial consumer protection authority, the Commission may engage with that Provincial protection authority in co –operative activities to detect and suppress prohibited conduct or offences in terms of this act, if there are any reasonable grounds to believe that any such conduct may be occurring within the province, or across its provincial boundaries”;

I urge all CPF members in particular; and everyone here to continue educating consumers about their rights and responsibilities. This week is indeed an opportune time for government to shine a spotlight on consumer challenges and for consumers to understand their rights.

Redress to the consumers

When consumers complain, they expect to be placed in the position they were at before the transaction took place. For a consumer, one would find relief when there is redress. The launch of the Tribunal today completes the cycle of consumer protection. We have a platform to adjudicate and ensure that there is fairness in dealings between consumers and suppliers.

The NCC congratulates the province on the launch of its Consumer Tribunal. This is a remarkable milestone as it means that consumers in the province will get quicker redress. And the NCC will be there every step of the way to help the province.

I thank you all. s