



## **Keynote Address by the Acting Commissioner, Ms Thezi Mabuza at the Launch of the Partnership between the University of Free State and NCC**

University of Free State Vice-Chancellor

Senior Management and Staff of the University

Lecturers and Students

The CEO of National Credit Regulators

Senior Management and Staff of NCR

NCC EXCO and Staff

Free State Consumer Protector Office

All stakeholders and other regulators present

Ladies and gentlemen.

Dumelang, Molweni, Middag, Good Afternoon

Ladies and gentlemen, we are gathered here today, because of the common interest in consumerism, but more specifically in consumer protection, which is a functional area of concurrent National and Provincial Legislative competence.

In 2008, the government legislated the Consumer Protection Act No.68 (CPA) which seeks to promote a fair, accessible, and sustainable marketplace for consumer products and services and for that purpose, to establish national norms and standards relating to consumer protection. The CPA is an Act of general application because it sets the standards for regulations in the consumer protection environment so that each legislation that purports to

serve the interest of consumers, must be aligned to the consumer rights in the CPA or provide more protection.

Within the consumer protection arena, there are various other regulators established in terms of various pieces of legislation to further ensure consumer protection. The NCC was established in terms of the Consumer Protection Act No.68 of 2008 (CPA) and the National Credit Regulator, by the National Credit Act. We also have provincial consumer protectors established through provincial legislation that is aligned with the CPA and plays a critical role in the protection of the rights of South African consumers in specific provinces.

In the process of discussing the collaboration of the two institutions to enhance consumer protection in this Province in particular, I am thrilled that we have gathered here to embark on this journey. Today, we will be signing two Memoranda between two Regulators in the consumer protection arena (the National Consumer Commission and the National Credit Regulator). This propitious gathering signifies the dawn of something new for the future of these institutions and consumerism.

We hope that this partnership and collaboration will contribute towards improved consumer protection through research that is going to influence consumer protection while addressing consumer concerns in the province.

The partnership will also see these institutions partnering to advance issues of consumer law and the incorporation of consumer protection principles through the development and delivery of various academic modules. In this andragogy approach, we envisage an opportunity where real cases at the National Consumer Commission and the National Credit Regulator will be shared with the students to analyse and critique and even develop novel approaches to addressing some of the consumer issues.

As we are consumers of goods and services, we must be active participants in the market, especially in the circular economy. Our goal with this partnership is to develop a calibre of students, consumers and citizens who are active in all facets of the economy and services that affect them. We hope that the intervention will hone and nudge our youth to question the consumer policies to influence sustainable consumption and ensure that our consumption patterns from farm to fork are geared to ensure that we protect the environment for future generations.

I am excited today to be part of and for you to bear witness to the signing of and launching of the partnership between the National Consumer Commission and the University of Free State, and the National Credit Regulator and the University of Free State.

Afford me the opportunity to outline the legislative mandate of the NCC, we are a regulatory body that protects the interest of consumers by ensuring that they receive the quantity and quality of goods and services purchased; and where those have not been met, we ensure that the affected consumers receive redress.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the NCC is continuing to make good progress in consumer protection activities and is a key consumer protector in South Africa, within the SADC region and on the African continent overall. In the past three years, from 2020 to March 2023, the NCC had dealt with 9 318 Complaints, investigated 1061 suppliers, issued compliance notices in the amount of R36.9 million, received administrative fines paid directly to the Revenue Fund in the amount of R61.5 million and provided redress to the consumers to the amount of R14.1 million. As we gain momentum and leverage on a partnership like this, we envisage that the impact will be higher.

Another key focus area is to bring consumer protection closer to the consumer through a mediated process. The NCC engages with targeted industries/ sectors on the development of industry codes and the expansion of alternate dispute resolution schemes in South Africa. Through the processes of the NCC, the Minister of Trade and Industry (then) accredited the ombud schemes for the motor industry and the consumer goods and services industry, while the Franchise Industry's is still in the process.

In line with the consumer protection policy of the Department of Trade Industry and Competition (dtic), the NCC must work closely with other key regulators in the industry to promote the resolution of consumer complaints. Allow me to share these good developments with you, the NCC chairs the Consumer Protection Forum (CPF). A key objective of the CPF is to harmonise consumer protection throughout the Republic. I am very pleased to further announce that the NCC is also involved with consumer protection at the Southern African Development Community (SADC) level, which requires the promotion of consumer protection amongst member states.

Without wasting much time, today I am here at the Free State Province to sign the Memorandum of Understanding with the University of Free State. Through this MOU, the NCC and UFS have aimed at strengthening and stimulating, facilitating the development of collaborative and mutually beneficial programs, which serve to enhance the intellectual development of law students, and cultural legal development including volunteering through participation in consumer protection and awareness activities.

**The MOU outlines key principles of cooperation, including:**

- Collaboration in consumer protection activities by carrying out targeted and planned consumer protection programmes in the Free State Province.
- Partnership with UFS to create a research-based approach that is responsive and effective in addressing consumer concerns within the Free State Province, based on empirical data.
- To incorporate Consumer Protection principles in the UFS curriculum through the development and delivery of various Academic Modules.
- To inculcate the culture of consumer activism amongst UFS students in collaboration with the activities of the NCC.
- To promote Consumer Protection within the Free State Province through collaborative efforts and interventions that will be undertaken between the parties, together with the Office of the Consumer Protector.
- To explore and promote any potential reforms of consumer policy.
- To promote continuous public awareness of consumer protection within the Free State.
- To partner in national programmes on the issues of consumer law.

Today, we highlight the commitment of all parties to this partnership to advance consumer protection, education and awareness programmes and activities.

Furthermore, this MOU will be for a period of three years and will be extended automatically for a further period of two years. This will enable all stakeholders to plan properly and align programmes accordingly to ensure good delivery of consumer protection activities.

I am pleased to inform all stakeholders gathered here that this MoU will be led by a joint working committee constituted by representatives of UFS, the NCC, the National Credit Regulator, and Free State Consumer Protector Office and other identified regulators within the sector.

Ladies and gentlemen, on behalf of the National Consumer Commission, we are thankful for a partnership of this magnitude with the University of Free State. We therefore congratulate this joint venture which is officiated today and wish the upcoming projects a success. Good luck to everyone and all stakeholders present.

Ladies and gentlemen, I thank You.