



Event: 2025 World Consumer Rights Day celebrations

Date: 14 March 2025

Venue: University of Mpumalanga

Welcoming Remarks by the Acting Commissioner of the National Consumer Commission, Mr Hardin Ratshisusu

Theme: "Empowering Consumers- Balancing Rights with Ethical Business Practices"

Thank you, programme directors.

We are truly privileged to have the Deputy Commissioner of the National Consumer Commission, Ms Thezi Mabuza, and the Head of Department of Economic Development and Tourism of Mpumalanga Province, Ms Immy Serakalala, as programme directors.

Good morning,

Welcome to the “land of the rising sun”, Mpumalanga. It is fitting that this event is hosted here in Mbombela.

MEC for Mpumalanga Economic Development and Tourism, Ms Makhosazane Masilela,
MEC for Free State Economic, Small Business Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs, Mr. Ketso Makume,

MMC for City Planning in Mbombela, Mr Morris Mazibane, on behalf of the Mayor of Mbombela,

Vice Chancellor of the University of Mpumalanga, Prof Thoko Mayekiso,

HOD Free State Economic, Small Business Development, Tourism and Environmental, Dr Godfrey Nokwequ,

Acting HOD Economic Development in Limpopo Economic Development,

Representatives from all provinces,

Representative of the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition, Mr Klaas Mokaba,
Director: Advocacy and Policy,

Regulators present here today, the National Consumer Commission, the Competition Commission (represented by Mr Andile Gwabeneni from the Office of the Commissioner), Council for Medical Schemes, National Regulator for Compulsory Specifications, National Credit Regulator, South Africa Bureau of Standards, Independent Communications Authority of South Africa, National Energy Regulator of South Africa, Financial Services Conduct Authority,

Ombuds represented here today, the Consumer Goods and Services Ombudsman (represented by CEO, Ms Queen Munyai and Lee Soobathi, the Ombudsman) and the Motor Industry Ombuds, National Financial Ombud, Credit Ombud Scheme, Consumer Protection Forum,

Our esteemed panellists, stakeholders, business formations, sponsors, practitioners, academics, students and student leaders, consumers in general, colleagues,

All protocol observed.

It is my great pleasure to welcome you all to this essential gathering as we celebrate 2025 World Consumer Rights Day. Today, we come together to recognise the power and importance of consumers in shaping fair, transparent, and sustainable markets.

Each year, this day serves as a global reminder that consumer rights are not just policies on paper but essential pillars of a just and ethical society. Whether it is the right to safety, the right to information, or the right to choose, protecting consumer rights ensures a marketplace that benefits everyone.

World Consumer Rights Day, first observed in 1983, has become a key event for promoting consumer awareness.

This year's global theme set by Consumer International for World Consumer Rights Day, "A Just Transition to Sustainable Lifestyles", highlights the importance of making sustainable choices accessible and affordable for all consumers.

However, the South African consumer protection authorities, under the banner of the Consumer Protection Forum, coined a South African theme - "Empowering Consumers - Balancing Rights with Ethical Business Practices" - which resonates with the challenges faced by South African consumers.

The theme seeks to educate businesses about their legislative responsibilities, whilst raising awareness and education amongst consumers on their rights and responsibilities as well.

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. We need to empower consumers to know their rights.

In recent times, the consumer protection space has witnessed multiple enforcement operations targeting illicit goods and substandard food products from being sold to unsuspecting consumers, underscoring the urgent need to address this widespread issue to safeguard public health and consumer rights.

The most burning issue in the South African consumer protection space lies in the manufacturing, distribution, and consumption of non-compliant goods. Recent inspections on local spaza shops in various communities have revealed expired food items on shelves, prompting their removal and destruction.

MEC, in this vein, we therefore started with market monitoring activities at the beginning of the week in Kwamhlanga, Tonga view, Mashinini, Lydenburg, Mbombela, business inspections and consumer education. This was a joint operation with consumer protection regulators, South African Police Services, Environmental Health Practitioners and all other provincial authorities. We must continue with this work, given the recent spate of foodborne illnesses affecting the most vulnerable consumers in our society – our children.

Today's commemoration is more than just an event - it is a platform for ideas and collaboration. This is reinforced by the planned panel discussions, which will explore topics such as **Food Safety and Sustainability, Emerging Consumer Trends in the Digital Age, and Fair Digital Financial Marketplace and Consumer Protection**, to engage in insightful discussions.

As we embark on today's discussions, let us remember that empowering consumers means empowering societies. Together, we can build a future where fairness, sustainability, and responsibility guide every business and policy decision.

This requires that the ecosystems of consumer protection in the country function optimally. This event today signifies this.

I extend my sincere gratitude to our distinguished speakers, policymakers, consumer advocates, and industry leaders who have joined us. Your voices and insights are instrumental in driving meaningful change.

Thank you, and I wish you all an insightful and inspiring World Consumer Rights Day!