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OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE MAYOR

Enquiries: M Booysen
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Date: 16 December 2020

Mr MC Ramaphosa
The Honourable President
Private Bag X1000,
Pretoria
0001

Per E-mail: mayor@gardenroute.gov.za

Dear President Ramaphosa

Happy Day of Reconciliation to you. I, Alderman Memory Booysen, Executive Mayor for Garden Route District Municipality (GRDM) am writing to you from the Local Government of the Garden Route district, stakeholders from public and private sectors, as well as Garden Routers and domestic and international tourists currently in and/or planning to visit our region over the current festive season. I want to firstly thank you for your leadership and support this past year, a trying one it has been. Secondly, I want to provide my assurance that this district continues to stand beside you as the struggle against the Covid-19 resurgence continues.

However, I must implore you to reconsider the decision to close the public beaches in our region. The particular regulations I refer to is that of the Amended Regulations on 15 December 2020 in the Government Gazette (No 1346 in GG 439997), in accordance to section 27(2) of the Disaster Management Act 57 of 2002.

The decision to close our beaches, while I do have some understanding for it, is in all likelihood not based on evidence that it will contribute to fighting the virus. In fact, the opposite is likely to happen as we now see large crowds of people flocking to every other amenity, including inland rivers, lagoons, lakes and shopping centres – centres which are enclosed spaces and where social distancing is far more difficult to adhere to than outdoors.

Our disaster management and health specialists, including Government's scientific advisors, are convinced that the decision to close large open areas, in particular beaches, to the public

may well have the opposite effect of that which we are hoping for. It may in fact lead to the Covid-19 numbers getting worse. Being outdoors in hot temperatures and receiving vitamin D is known to be effective in combating Covid-19. Vitamin D has been scientifically shown to have a beneficial impact in preventing infection with bacterial and viral diseases. In a recent study conducted by University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust in the UK, researchers found that those with severe COVID-19 are more vitamin D-deficient than those with mild disease.

Our district has worked very hard over the past year to have structures in place to do enforcement of venues including beaches and we will monitor every public area to ensure compliance to regulations if our beaches are re-opened. I am sure the people of the Garden Route and our visitors over the festive season, will also work with us and be responsible given the opportunity. We are also extremely concerned about the trend of cancellations by tourists who had planned to visit our region over the festive season; this time of the year adds up to 35% to the annual turnover of our small and micro businesses over December and January. The seasonal income is also that which helps sustain the very businesses we have worked so very hard to support and promote.

Those providing accommodation to domestic and international travellers have been brought to their knees. We received an update from one of our accommodation booking sites who highlighted the following shocking statistics that they witnessed. "We have had 477 cancellations between 8pm (speech) and 2pm yesterday, worth 3.8 million. And that was just the online bookings from one large online agent and client's own website".

It is in light of all my concerns above, that I must humbly ask that you reopen our beaches. If not for the entire season, then please on the same basis as KwaZulu-Natal beaches, with beaches closed for public holidays only. To view the beaches affected by the recent amended regulations, access this link:

<https://gardenroutedm.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=c5645d8e62cd4d0aa148a965411ec611>

This matter can be resolved with a simple phone call or an announcement from your office to allow the reopening of our beaches.

I look forward to hearing from you as a matter of urgency.

With thanks.

Yours sincerely



ALDERMAN MEMORY BOOYSEN
EXECUTIVE MAYOR

DATE: 16 December 2020