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COVID - 19

LEVEL 4 RESTRICTIONS AND MOVING TOWARDS THE RESTORATION OF OUR ECONOMY

Dear Plett Residents

No doubt the Covid-19 lock down has come as a massive shock to all of you but none more so than those who either own a business or otherwise earn a living in the Bitou area. The extension of the lock down for a further 2-week period has undoubtedly caused even more concern but in many ways the most frightening aspect of the entire exercise is yet to come and that is re-entering the work place with great concern as to what you will find when you get there. In many ways it will be a bit like re-entering an area after a natural disaster. Nothing will be the same. If it was back to business as usual, some hard work and determination would soon rectify the interruption in momentum and income but, sadly, it is not going to be like that. Even if your business was permitted to open on Friday 1st May, many businesses upon whom you depend for your turnover may not be permitted to operate as yet as a result of which you may be facing similar expenses with a lesser income. For employees this may mean that you will be made redundant or your salary reduced if that has not happened to you already. To add to the challenges, our most important industry, being the tourism industry, will have been the industry most severely impacted upon and the most challenging to resuscitate as historically we have been very dependent on inbound tourism which tourists are subject to restrictions of their own. As an inevitable knock on effect, many other businesses depend on tourism and will be negatively impacted.

The question is "where do we go from here?"

Clearly re-inventing the way we do business and moving as rapidly as we can towards level 1 and beyond must be first and foremost in our minds.

Shortly before the President's address to the nation when announcing the extension of the lockdown, an eminent doctor was interviewed who brought valuable perspective to the predicament faced by the country. In essence he said two very important things.

The first was that the initial predictions concerning the spread and potential impact of the Coronavirus were just that – predictions in the absence of any real scientific data as the virus had so recently appeared on the scene. I believe that we are already seeing that some of the more dire predictions have not come to pass including those pertaining to the spread and impact of the virus in South Africa. At this point in time we are way behind predicted levels of spread and we share this in common with most of the rest of the world. This is encouraging but by no means any reason for complacency which leads directly into the second and most important point and that is:

“What will happen depends on what we do – or don’t do”

In short, the spread and impact of the disease is in the hands of the individual and all of us cooperatively as a town comprising of individuals – each one of us acting sensibly and diligently doing what we are being instructed to do.

Whether you are a businessman desperately striving to save your business or a retired person wondering when you will be able to once again enjoy a cup of coffee with your friends at a coffee shop or get your hair done, the answer is the same. We are all in this together.

If we all pull together and make maximum effort as a town, we should be able to move quite rapidly back to relative normality with most businesses opening so that we can commence the restoration process. Conversely if there are those amongst us who, for one reason or another, believe that the laid down protocols do not apply to them, we will walk a far longer, harder and less pleasant road with a far more severe impact on our economy. It is as simple as that.

Diligently wearing an adequate facial mask is increasingly being recognised as the key to any strategy to contain the spread of the virus. Germany, which has traditionally shunned masks like many other countries to their cost, have legislated the wearing of masks as part of their strategy to re-open the economy. As an indication of how seriously the Germans now take this issue, a fine of up to US\$5000.00 can be imposed on those failing to comply. From the 1st May the law will require all of us to wear face masks at all times when in a public place. It is up to all businesses and each one of us to ensure that every individual in our town wears a mask at all relevant times. No individual should be admitted to business premises or be engaged in conversation unless wearing a mask. A common practice that has been observed is pulling down one’s mask when talking. Talking spreads droplets and is a “high risk of spread” occupation so a mask should not only be worn but in place at all times.

Moving back to normality will also have its challenges because once we are heading there, we will have more visitors visiting our town whilst we are striving to preserve that relative normality. At present we have zero active Covid cases in the Bitou area and no new cases have been detected for some weeks despite extensive testing in some areas. We must strive to keep it that way by not only practicing recommended guidelines diligently but insisting that those that visit our town do likewise.

Insofar as businesses are concerned, you not only need to have in place the full raft of protocols in active use but insist that those that enter your premises adhere to those protocols by having their hands sanitised and wearing a mask at all times. A recent review of supermarkets and other businesses currently open revealed a high degree of non-compliance with recommended guidelines and carelessness in implementation even when protocols were in place. Amongst these non-compliance issues were the following:-

1. Staff not in possession of masks – plastic shields are no substitute for a mask but can be used in addition to a mask for additional protection;
2. Staff (and management) in possession of a mask but the mask strung around the neck or otherwise not properly in place;
3. Ineffective hand cleansing facilities at the entrance.

Remember the principle of **“your mask protects me and my mask protects you”**. Those failing to adhere to mask wearing requirements are a risk to our society.

It is a question of preventing virus containing droplets being ejected into the air – this is what a cloth mask achieves.

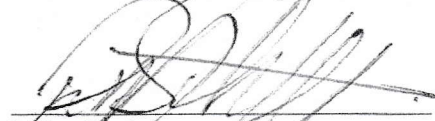
As a community let us pull together and unite in a common effort like never before and beat this virus and restore our economy.

Detailed instructions on how to avoid contracting Covid – 19 are available on the Plett Tourism and Business Chamber websites.

Finally, but equally importantly, support local businesses whenever you can and think innovation in the way you conduct business.

Let us together restore that wonderful Plett feeling to our town.

Yours in the love and preservation of Plett.



Mike Scoltz
~~President~~ **CHAIRMAN**
Plettenberg Bay Business Chamber



Marius Venter
Chief Executive Officer
Plett Tourism Association