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The Road Freight Association

Reg. No. 1981/010367/08 Non Profit Company (NPC)

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Covid-19 Industry Updates

www.rfa.co.za/covid



04 May 2020

Minister Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma

Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs

Per email: MandisaMB@coqta.gov.za; MathoM@coqta.gov.za; CarolineM@coqta.gov.za; legadimal@coqta.gov.za

Minister Fikile Mbalula

Minister of Transport

Per email: TransportMinistry@dot.gov.za

Dear Honourable Ministers

Relaxation of restrictions on furniture removal companies

The above matter for your urgent attention.

On 26 April 2020, we forwarded the road freight industry proposals regarding the controlled opening of road freight and logistics to Yourself. This is attached as Annexure A.

Road freight role in keeping COVID-19 infection rates down

The road freight industry has been at the forefront of ensuring essentials are delivered across the country (and to neighbouring countries) since application of the lock down on 26 March 2020. During this time, all road freight and logistics services operating under the essential conditions of the lock down (transport, packing and offloading, warehousing, storage, distribution, picking, cross-docks and supply chains) have operated safely and efficiently as well as having implemented the strictest of COVID-19 prevention protocols.

Every day – thousands of products are picked, packed and delivered to thousands of retail outlets across the country (and regionally) through our professional and world class supply chain businesses that have implemented the required standards and compliance relating to covid-19 prevention measures.

Without Trucks South Africa Stops!

Directors: GC Marais (Chairperson), SP Lunga (Vice Chairperson), TP Bantock, TL Bereda, GD Bolton, AJ Du Preez, D Joubert, GA Kelly, PW Mountford, PEJ Pols, M Sodalay, SJ Swanepoel, AK Tayob, N van der Westhuizen

Chief Executive: GA Kelly

These industry protocols have been in place long before the gazette guidelines were published on 30 April 2020. The RFA also provided the Industry Protocols on 26 March 2020 (Annexure B).

We are confident that the measures put in place by the road freight industry have kept the road freight employees and general public safe from infection and from possible contaminated goods for over 31 days.

Reasonability of exclusion from operation

It was with dismay that we learned of parts of the road freight logistics chain not being allowed to operate –these are:

- 1 Furniture removals – this sector of road freight applies strict hygiene protocols for employees, premises and goods handled. These include (amongst others) individual cleaning and wrapping, bound items to secure against breakage, isolated and quarantine storage for exports, sanitary storage for long term items, pre and post venue cleaning and sanitizing services as well as employee protection against dust, chemical contamination and general injury. This sector operates at high levels of professionalism and is as strict and professional about their commitment to safety and hygiene as are other consumer goods transporters.

We fail to understand why this specific sector of road freight transport was singled out by the Minister of COGTA during the question and answer session on 01 May 2020 as definitely NOT being allowed to operate. The operation involves less interaction between persons (which is the government's position on how covid-19 is transmitted) than many other currently allowed activities (including delivery of goods to retail outlets, opening of public transport operations and the relaxation on informal trading).

A furniture move is traditionally a “closed environment” – the consignor and consignee being identical in most instances – the venue being the only change in the chain. In most cases the crew and vehicle(s) involved in the loading are used in the offloading (delivery). In acknowledging the low level of contamination risk, as well as the need for the sector to begin generating income to support its employees, Australia has allowed furniture removals to operate under their relaxed conditions (Annexure C).

The chances for cross-infection are at least 75% less than that of persons in a mini-bus taxi filled to 70% (given these vehicles continually load and offload passengers from various unknown destinations, untested and uncontrolled). Midi- and large busses have even greater risk of infection, with trains being the greatest high-risk area.

The furniture sector of transport is simply not high risk.

- 2 General containerised goods – once again the reasoning behind the ban on goods being unpacked and moved from depots and warehouses to retail and distribution depots within the road freight logistics chain is not understood.

The goods have all passed through a minimum quarantine period of 14 days whilst on the vessels (and the international community is in agreement that containers exposed to salt water in transit have almost zero rate of containing transmittable levels of covid-19).

In addition – it must be remembered that the containers entering the country are part of a cycle of movements around the world – and these need to leave as “empty” or with export cargo for international destinations. The continual prevention of this part of the international trade cycle (which is being opened up around the world as we speak) will eventually result in shipping lines no longer coming to South Africa as the cargo levels do not make South Africa a viable destination.

Warehouses and depots (especially where linked to road freight operations) are now as congested as the ports of entry and require the movement of goods from these facilities onwards to wholesale and retail destinations. The logistic providers are additionally paying for the congested storage space over and above their inability to operate and generate revenue.

Against this backdrop – we note that the agriculture industry has been given general permission to operate at 100%. The exposure to infection through the various labour intensive processes from origination, harvesting, packaging, processing and retail are far more open to risk than general road freight operations. In this industry road freight is permitted to operate – what – then, is the reasoning for furniture and container delivery to customers not being permitted?

As of 04 May 2020, at 16:30, a public announcement was made allowing the film production industry to resume work. This industry – by nature, moves sets and related equipment as required. This is a contradiction in the application of restrictions. This industry persons interacting with one another – which is high risk in terms of COVID-19 transmission and infection.

There is no sound reasoning for the restrictions imposed on the furniture nor the container logistics industry – as risk cannot be the underlying reason for the decision given the case presented relating to agriculture.

We are at a critical junction in terms of the continued employment of workers. The sustainability of specific sectors in the road freight transport industry (furniture per example) must be protected.

The Association, therefore, requests that the Ministers urgently promulgate the immediate:

- operation of furniture removals,
- delivery containerised goods to wholesalers and/or retailers including return / forwarding of empty containers as required by the logistics industry, and
- Persons that wish to relocate to new homes, whether purchased or leased, are permitted to do so under Alert level 4 provided they apply for a 72 hour permission from their local SAPS station at the departure point.

Such a permission is to contain the departure date and address, the destination address as well as the names and identity numbers of those relocating with the validity period indicated in the permission letter, which is to be approved by the Head of Station / delegated officer.

We look forward to your urgent attention and resolution to these matters. Please feel free to contact us should require any further information.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gavin Kelly', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Gavin Kelly

Chief Executive Officer

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