

Calls to restrict alcohol sales disregard state of the SA economy - Salba

The South African Liquor Brandowners Association (Salba) has responded negatively to [a recent statement](#) issued by the Southern African Alcohol Policy Alliance (Saapa), in which Saapa urged the government to respond to the looming third wave of the Covid-19 infections by strengthening the current restrictions on alcohol access.

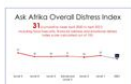


Salba slammed the statement, saying that it demonstrates Saapa's lack of regard for the state of the country's economy, growing unemployment and collapse of businesses partly as a result of the three bans on alcohol sales over the past year. It added that the proposed restrictions on alcohol advertising and other alcohol policy interventions are irrelevant to the national response to the possibility of third wave of Covid-19.

Contribution to Covid-19 response

Sibani Mngadi, chairperson of Salba said it was disturbing that Saapa, which he claims has made no contribution to the national Covid-19 response, is calling for another restriction on alcohol sales.

Noting the contribution of the alcohol industry, Mngadi said, "We donated more than 200 million litres of pure alcohol when the country was facing shortages of sanitiser. We have supported government procurement of PPEs and other consumables for hospitals. We have hired community patrollers to support compliance with Covid-19 protocols in outlets and financially supported the recovery of the restaurants, bars and taverns sector."



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Mngadi called on Saapa to demonstrate to the public the organisation's contribution to the national Covid-19 response and/or promotion of responsible alcohol consumption.

“What Saapa fails to understand is that South Africa is a constitutional democracy with established and transparent rules for policy formulation and amending legislation. Lockdown regulations are there to help our country to respond to a specific, major problem of the Covid-19 pandemic.

“The national state of disaster is about saving lives from the pandemic while protecting livelihoods in a society challenged with a triple burden of unemployment, poverty and inequality. It is not a platform to further an individual entity’s agenda on anti-alcohol advocacy,” Mngadi said.

Look to science

Last week, a joint statement issued by Salba and Vinpro urged the government to rely on the scientific advice of its own panel of health experts in the Ministerial Advisory Council (MAC) in responding to the surge in Covid-19 cases.

The targeted population herd immunity threshold is 29 million adults, which it must achieve before the end of the year to avoid significantly higher numbers of Covid-related deaths. To achieve this, South Africa must vaccinate 250,000 to 300,000 people per day.

Vinpro MD Rico Basson said that the surge in daily cases of infections was a warning to everyone to remain vigilant and adhere to health protocols. “We know that following the basics – social distancing, hand sanitising and wearing a mask in public – is still the first line of defence against infection.”

This advice was supported by research carried out by the [National Institute for Communicable Diseases](#) (NICD) and the universities of Stellenbosch, Cape Town and Wits. It found that limiting the size and frequency of gatherings, ensuring proper ventilation, wearing masks, and handwashing would effectively push back the third wave.



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Curbing losses

The South African alcohol industry and its stakeholders has repeatedly made recommendations to the government through Nedlac on measures to deal with surges in cases of Covid-19 infections and will continue to work with government in an effort to save lives, while protecting livelihoods of a million jobs supported by the alcohol value-chain.

“The industry has suffered more than R36.3bn loss in sales revenue and government has lost R8,7bn in excise tax and R29.3bn in tax revenue (excluding excise tax) from the value chain as a result of the past three bans of alcohol sales. However, we stand by our commitment to being part of the president’s economic growth plan. The alcohol industry can – and does – play an important role as an engine of economic growth in SA,” Mngadi added.

He added that the vaccination rollout is the ultimate solution to restrictions so that the economy can move toward recovery. This requires urgency in terms of rolling out the programme and the industry says it is willing to provide whatever logistical assistance the government requires to achieve this huge operational undertaking.

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