

New liquor agency brings sobering news

By [Luphert Chilwane](#)

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The establishment of the Gauteng Liquor Agency to replace of the Gauteng Liquor Board will reduce the huge backlog of licence applications, according to agency CEO Keith Khoza.

Khoza said last week that the establishment of the new agency had helped reduce the pile of licence applications, and the turnaround time to issue licences had improved from more than five months to at least less than three months.

He said under the Gauteng Liquor Board, it had taken months on average for liquor traders to get licences, a situation that forced many liquor traders to operate without licences.

“I have lost count of the applications that we are processing every day,” he said.

Prof Gideon Nieman of the department of business management at the University of Pretoria, alleged in a [letter](#) to *Business Day* that most restaurateurs were forced to trade without licences, which often led to restaurants being raided by the police, resulting in fines, loss of stock, embarrassment in front of customers and benefit for competitors.

Nieman blamed the provincial government's liquor board for turning honest entrepreneurs and liquor traders into criminals.

Khoza said the main objective in establishing the new agency was to transform the liquor regulator into an effective, independent body, away from the government bureaucracy.

The agency's biggest role was to protect and promote liquor traders, he said.

He said the biggest challenge the agency faced was people trading before being issued their liquor licences.

This was against the law and the police would act against it, Khoza said.

The Congress of the People (COPE) accused the (old) liquor board of lacking managerial skills and promoting nepotism.

Hermene Koorts, COPE member and former Democratic Alliance spokesman on finance, said most board employees were young girls without proper training or qualifications.

“Little work is done by the liquor board and files get lost while the board is far behind in issuing new licences.

“Lack of experience by the head-hunted liquor officers result in chaos,” he said.

Khoza said there was no nepotism within the agency.

“When I was called in to work for the agency, the provincial MEC wanted me to stabilise the liquor board,” he said.

SA Liquor Traders Association president Saint Madlala, whose organisation represents 250,000 traders across the country, said the establishment of the new agency meant that liquor traders would no longer have to wait for years to get their licences.

“We have welcomed the new agency and we already have interacted with them.

“They really want to change things around.

“Let us offer them the opportunity to do so,” he said.

Source: Business Day

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