

Notes from Meetings with MEFT and NTB on 31 August 2022

MEFT: Present : Sebulon Chicalu, Martin Webb-Bowen, Kenneth Kapitako

Main purpose was to introduce the new Fenata Chairman and Vice Chairman, and to improve communications between the Ministry and the representatives of the Private Sector.

Other matters :

Review Park Opening times to allow early and late access to Etosha National Park to take advantage of prime light conditions for photography. This can be considered if a formal application is made, although it would only apply to certain areas. Access at Sesriem is deliberately restricted to NWR in order to give them a commercial advantage – now also extended to Dead Valley Lodge which is also inside the park gates. Extended opening hours for Etosha would involve overtime payments (which could be accommodated by an additional fee for early access), but would still be subject to considerations about poaching

Reduced park fees in low season and for African guests from outside SADC region. Possibility of extending this to guests travelling with Namibian operators. Both already under consideration and subject for future discussions

Crime against Tourists. Special Police unit was being re-established but co-ordination was still poor. We need nominated contacts in MEFT to work on this with private sector (led by TASA) and the Police. Contact details of nominated official(s) from MEFT to be forwarded.

Helicopter access to Namib Naukluft Park. Follow up from previous discussions. No immediate objection but MEFT would need a formal proposal from the Private Sector – to be provided by Fenata.

Tour Guide Registration. The Ministry believes that tour guiding is a profession and that all tour guides should be registered. NTB can only register National Guides with qualifications or Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) as approved by NTA. This is ongoing. The Ministry to set up registration of trainee and local guides. More institutions need to get involved in tour guide training as the high level of requirement at NATH made their courses too expensive for most trainees. Regulations for trainee guides need to be finalized

Ministry request that Fenata take up its original role of coordination between the private sector associations so that they no longer receive contradictory requests from different organisations. They also want one designated point of contact with the industry and asked that Fenata establish a secretariat to allow that to happen and to speed up responses to requests. It was explained that Fenata has limited resources, but that this request would be taken to the Board for consideration

Ministry wants to reinvigorate the Tourism Advisory Council (TAC) and expects Fenata involvement in that, especially concerning the National Tourism Recovery Plan .

Ministry requires assistance with setting up programmes in the KAZA area before that becomes dominated by other member countries. Requirement for at least two tour products in the area, possibly including one that goes through the Tsumkwe /Tsodilo area. Maybe something that an ETEA member might like to offer. Ministry already making progress on UniVisa concept for the area.

Ministry would like operators to investigate cross border tours into Angola, specifically to visit the Iona park. Portuguese speaking operators could be well placed to offer this.

NTB: Present Digu Naobeb, Martin Webb-Bowen, Kenneth Kapitano

Main purpose was to introduce the new Fenata Chairman and Vice Chairman, and to find out more about NTB priorities and future plans.

Marketing :

NTB still working on primary markets such as Germany, France, UK, Italy, USA and South Africa. NTB reps present in many and trying to increase awareness of Namibia, but with minimal funding

Secondary markets are China, Baltics, Nordics, Spain and Portugal, Angola, Zambia, Botswana and Zimbabwe. Limited options for action, but responsive to requests for familiarisation visits, especially for accredited travel journalists. Support from tour operators and property owners much appreciated when available

Tertiary markets are Middle East, India, Malaysia, Japan, Nigeria and Ghana. Promotional work going on in Nigeria and Ghana and operators invited from there. However, most find Namibia too expensive, even if compared to East Africa so there is need to identify operators, possibly from the Emerging Enterprise sector who might like to focus on this market and offer specialized product. It was emphasized that this still needed to offer good quality, but it could also include less expensive venues offered by people who could also include a local cultural element.

Current NTB focus is on Trade Fairs (Indaba, WTM Cape Town and ITB etc) and road shows. They also support Expos in Windhoek and Ongwediva etc. Plan to hold a local trade show in Swakopmund with thirty exhibitors and the hope this will be taken up by coastal operators (first come first served basis)

These are apparently all subjects under consideration by the NTB's Marketing Advisory Committee

Regulations and Tour Guide Registration :

NTB is currently working on an amendment to their act which removes the regulatory function and makes them a purely marketing organization. This is as determined by a committee led by MEFT and allegedly supported by parts of the private sector. The bill is currently with the Minister and scheduled to be taken to Parliament later this year. If it is passed, NTB will no longer have a mandate to regulate the industry or to start the registration process for national guides. However, NTB would still continue to register accommodation venues and require them to pay levies to go towards their marketing costs. It would also continue to register the current regulated sectors and intended to change this to annual registration in return for a fee.

It was noted that MEFT had just told us that NTB would be required to register national tour guides very soon, although the Ministry intended to register junior/ trainee guides. Digu said NTB has all the necessary regulations available to register national guides if instructed to do so, but won't start with that until the lines of responsibility are clarified, and won't do it at all if their mandate is changed as currently expected. NTB saw no need to register local and trainee guides who worked at lodges, National Parks, National Heritage sites, museums etc as these were already supervised by their various employers. It was only when they moved away from their original area of operation and became National guides that they saw any need for them to be registered and regulated.

It was pointed out that one of the main roles expected of the NTB was to regulate tourism enterprises and to discipline any who brought the industry and the country's reputation into disrepute, and to prevent them from operating if necessary. It seems this is not a role that NTB can fulfil and the only option for those who feel they have not received the services paid for is to open a civil case.