

Government doesn't understand that #JobsSavesLives

By Greg Krumbock MP – DA Member on the Portfolio Committee on Tourism

When national, provincial and local governments and their departments work at cross purposes to maintain and promote our key tourist destinations, the result is crumbling infrastructure, blighted resorts, and well-informed travelers who take their business elsewhere.

So, the Portfolio Committee on Tourism's visit to the Howick Falls in KwaZulu-Natal last year offered a flicker of hope. National, provincial and local government with their attendant clouds of officials all committed to working together to address the serious decline and degradation of this once iconic landmark, the only waterfall within the CBD of any South African town or city. Key outcomes were set, deadlines imposed, and progress reports scheduled.

Fast forward to July 2020, 10 months later, and all that has changed is that despair has triumphed over hope. The Falls Gorge Walk kiosk still stands stripped bare and derelict, a grim reminder of the apogee of local government ineptitude. Alcohol and drug-fueled revelers continued to trash Goddard Park right up to the lockdown, albeit more circumspectly as a land invasion of Goddard Park turned the resort into a public toilet. No boom gates, cameras or proper security can be seen, except those who regularly attend the ruling elite of uMngeni Municipality.

No people have been relocated from the informal settlement to proper accommodation at Ekhayalisha, but then again, did anybody actually believe the unblushing official who told the committee this would happen when everybody knew that 90% of the residents were not South African citizens and therefore did not qualify for RDP housing?

And so, tourism numbers have fallen by 90%, businesses have closed, many jobs have been lost, and hundreds who were supported by this once-thriving resort go hungry.

The municipality has not yet even tabled its January 2020 report to the committee and continues to frustrate other spheres of government. So much for co-operative governance!

Letters asking for information from the Honourable de Freitas to the Tourism committee chairperson stretching back to February have met a similar fate – zero response. So much for pious calls for working together across party lines in one committee!

But why should we be surprised? Is this not the same government that openly legislates for only some employers and therefore only some employees to receive support during the pandemic? Is this not the same government which has ruled for a generation, but cannot reliably generate electricity? The same government that, R63 billion later, has flown SAA into the ground, that wants to force the entire country into an NHI while rats lick up blood and desperate patients fight each other for oxygen in Eastern Cape hospitals?

The same government indeed, that will allow taxis to operate at full capacity, and expects us to believe that its windows will be open in the freezing winter, but will not allow safe open game drives in struggling tourism resorts?

The message is clear: this government does not care about tourism and does not understand that jobs save lives.