

Govt's reliance on alcohol restrictions "immensely damaging" - PnP chairman

Speaking at the announcement of Pick n Pay's financial results on Wednesday, chairman Gareth Ackerman said the retailer is concerned that the Covid-19-related state of disaster is being "used by elements of government to address liquor policy issues without resorting to the constitutional processes".



Gareth Ackerman, Pick n Pay chairman. Source: Supplied

"The government's reliance on restricting alcohol sales as part of its Covid-19 response has been immensely damaging. There is a wealth of evidence to show that it has little or no positive impact as a public health measure, but it has an immensely negative impact on jobs, on the economy, on confidence in our Covid response, and of course on the performance of businesses like ours," Ackerman said.

Election day liquor restrictions loom

He added, "We will continue to support the government in its fight against Covid-19, in ensuring that as many people as possible are vaccinated. But we implore government to heed the evidence and resist the temptation to reach again for restrictions on alcohol sales. It is of concern that liquor restrictions are being put in place for the local elections. We need to focus on getting the country vaccinated rather than putting further restrictions on citizens' rights."

Ackerman pleaded for greater transparency from government. "Policies and proposals issued by ministers should reflect what government has said it intends to do, without last-minute changes or surprises. I hope the Companies Amendment Bill will be a good example of consistency and transparency," he said.



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The Beer Association of South Africa (Basa) also expressed its concern this week around the risk that government will once again "enforce arbitrary alcohol restrictions" when the expected fourth wave of Covid-19 infections hits in December.

Basa has therefore written to Minister of Trade, Industry and Competition (DTIC) Ebrahim Patel requesting his urgent intervention at a cabinet level to ensure that irrational alcohol bans are no longer imposed, especially over the festive season, which the association said is a critical time for the local beer industry and the thousands of jobs it supports.

"Basa fears that our local beer industry could once again suffer the consequences of government restrictions in the lead up to summer. This concern has been reinforced by Minister Cele announcing that alcohol sales will be banned on municipal election day, with no reason given for government's decision or any consultation with the industry having taken place," the association said.



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Mooi River toll plaza

Ackerman also urged the government to rethink the location of the Mooi River toll plaza on the N3 between Durban and Johannesburg, which was shut down during the civil unrest in July.

"Government, like business, must also learn lessons from the July crisis. For example, we saw in July how the N3 highway is one of the country's most vital arteries. Let us ensure that the Mooi River toll plaza is not rebuilt in the same place, so that it cannot be used again to block this artery and cripple the country."

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