

‘Kill Airbnb Bill’ must not hinder growth in tourism industry

By Hlanganani Gumbi – DA Shadow Deputy Minister of Tourism

The tourism sector is one of the largest job creators in South Africa. It is the industry that facilitates the hiring of hundreds of thousands of chiefs, cooks, waiters, cleaners, barmen, tour guides, taxi cabs, as well as provides various jobs around beaches, parks, sports facilities and other places of interest. It is no wonder that it created 40 000 new jobs between 2012 and 2016.

And so, the Democratic Alliance (DA) is notes carefully the motives of the Minister of Tourism when she proposes the “Kill Airbnb” Bill, in the form of the Draft Tourism Amendment Bill. Why Honourable Minister, why are you after a company which delivers innovation, that levels the playing field, that creates jobs and new wealth for the small players? Who are you working for? It is not for the small guesthouse owner, the cook at the bed and breakfast, it is not for the cleaner at the small boutique hotel.

Have you ever personally used Airbnb, Minister? And seen these people who have new jobs? Honourable Minister, in your hunger to kill Airbnb, we will stand up against you and defend the hundreds of thousands of jobs you also plan to destroy in the process.

This brings me to my second urgent matter, which needs to be resolved if we wish to create new jobs. This is the cost of grading places of accommodation and the structure of the grading council. It cannot be acceptable that it costs, on average, R5 200 for a star behind a guest house’s name. It is unacceptable that entrepreneurs who wish to start a small guesthouse or lodge, with very little money, to pay so much, for a star behind their name. Such high costs do nothing for inclusion, empowerment and new business. It does nothing to level the playing field and create new jobs. We need to move to a system of free grading, especially for small businesses, so that they may receive the benefits associated with an official star grading.

We can create new restaurants, guest houses and jobs if we create the right ecosystem for them to thrive. We can do this by implementing suitable regulations, which are able to regulate the industry appropriately – we will do more damage than good by creating laws which generate unfair playing fields. Where we govern in the Western Cape, our policies do exactly that – which has led to this province becoming South Africa’s most developed tourism region. One in ten employees in the Western Cape earns a living through the tourism industry, and it contributes more than R25 billion to the provincial economy.