

LIQUOR ACT PUTS TRADERS INTO A SPIN

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Tavern owners who have been protesting against the new opening and closing hours contained in the new trading hours legislation can rest easy.

The Free State government has promised to take their views into consideration.

Owners of liquor outlets across the province have threatened to take Free State Premier Ace Magashule to court because they are unhappy over several stipulations in the act, which requires owners to close their doors for business at midnight.

President of Free State Liquor Traders Association Khulu Radebe said members wanted the act to clearly stipulate which taverns would be allowed to operate from 2pm until midnight.

He said operators also wanted the law to specify the types of taverns that would be allowed to operate 24 hours. They also wanted the act to allow 18 year olds into taverns. Another provision on which they seek clarification is one that prohibits private companies from running bars for their employees.

Members of the association marched to the offices of the department of economic development earlier this month to voice their grievances at the new Liquor Act, which was promulgated in March.

Spokesperson for the department Kgotso Tau said MEC Mxolisi Dukwana had "committed his department to open negotiations with liquor traders".

He said the department had published the interim amendments to the act on December 14, in order to allow more time for consultation.

The chairperson of the newly established Free State Liquor and Gambling Authority, Dhilosen Pillay, said that it was important for the provincial government and the liquor industry to find common ground in the regulation of the liquor industry. The interim amendments stipulate that:

- Licence renewal fees will be increased by 50%;
- The new deadline for applications for licence renewal has been moved to February 28;
- The previous trading hours will be applicable until the consultation process for the new act has been completed;
- Old licence categories will temporarily stay the same, even if the licence needs to be renewed.

The Free State provincial government has established a task team – also consisting of liquor traders, South African Breweries and the police – to address problems in the liquor industry.

Dukwana warned liquor outlets that compliance with regulations would receive added attention during the festive season.

A team of licence inspectors and designated officers would police the estimated 6 000 licensed liquor outlets in the province, he said.

[Source: www.thenewage.co.za]