

Something fishy with the beach closures

By [Howard Feldman](#)

17 Dec 2020

Over the past 40 Sundays, I have recorded a Covid focused podcast with specialist pulmonologist Dr Anton Meyberg.

He is as close as possible to being an expert in the field, if that is achievable so early in the life cycle of the disease. Besides this, each day since the pandemic began, he has updated my morning show and tracked the ebb and flow of the South African and global situation.

He has treated hundreds, if not thousands, of Covid patients and sits on the advisory committees of many educational and aged facilities. Dr Meyberg has largely been supportive of government regulations...



NH53 via [Wikimedia Commons](#)/ [Gbawden](#)

Until now.

His response to the announcement of the wholesale closure of the beaches along the Garden Route and Eastern Cape?

"Gobsmacked!"

The closure of the beaches on the Garden Route and Eastern Cape appears much like the banning of cigarettes to be an irrational decision. On the surface, it makes little sense to prevent people from enjoying the open air along the hundreds of

kilometres of beaches, and in doing so, force them to shopping centres, restaurants and other indoor venues.

Whereas the closure of beaches on traditionally busy days like Christmas and New Year's Day as has been enacted in Cape Town and KwaZulu-Natal makes sense, the decision to do this in an area where beaches are not generally overcrowded seems harsh, unreasonable, and frankly suspicious.

"First world problems." "Privileged issues." "The 'Karens' are unhappy," are comments that I have heard about complaints of the beach closure. All this might be true, but **it is worth considering**:

- The emotional and psychological impact of 2020 is not to be underestimated. Children and adults are suffering from depression at levels seldom seen. A day at the beach, especially on days when they are not too crowded provides benefits far greater than it poses a risk of Covid transmission.
- A great number of tourists expecting a beach holiday have already cancelled their trip to the impacted area. The financial loss to the establishments and ancillary services in the hospitality area will be a massive blow to an already crippled industry. Once again, allowing them to go to a beach would have prevented this.
- We need to be able to face 2021 with positivity. One of the ways we restore lost energy is to have a break with family or friends. Both in the media space and as head of People at a technology company, I have seen first-hand the impact that the past year has had on the psyche of us all. The heavy-handed sledgehammer approach to the beach in some areas ignores this and other factors that should have been considered before the decision was made.

In order for any form of lockdown to work successfully and for people to be compliant, the regulations need to be rational, transparent and credible. The banning of cigarettes early in the year had marked a significant turning point for the President as support waned and discontent grew. The reason was not the harshness of the edict, but the irrationality, which in turn made people suspicious and uncomfortable with every rule imposed from that point onward. The closure of the beaches is the banning of cigarettes, Version 2.

There is no doubt that compliance will be spotty. There is every chance that people will find ways around the regulations and local police will be forced to "follow orders". They will be placed in a very uncomfortable position. What is further interesting is how they will enforce this considering that they have not been able to deal with South Africa's crime statistics and have not been able to get this under control.

The President's announcement was not met with support across the political divide. According to Alan Winde, Premier of the Western Cape: "In the hotspot of the Garden Route, I think the blanket ban or blunt closure of all our beaches for the festive season is something that we will be engaging the President on. I do not believe that that is the solution. We're advocating for people to get outside for open spaces but we're also going to make sure there's management in place."

Beaches along the Garden Route will be closed until January 3rd. Even with the looming closure, the beach that we visited was not overcrowded. It was spacious and spread out. And mostly compliant.

What I saw were parents relaxing, children playing in the water, running in and out of the surf and laughing as they did so. I watched them haul their 'boogie boards' up and the beach shouting playfully as moms and dads called out instructions and shouted advice that they couldn't hear over the sound of the crashing waves. And then I imagined them the next day, with the beach out of bounds.

I pictured them locked up at home watching something they have already seen on Netflix calling out for pizza over the sound of a stale sitcom, and I know with no doubt, that the President has gotten this one completely wrong.

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