During South African President Cyril Ramaphosa’s address to the nation on Sunday night, 15 March 2020, he declared a national state of disaster and announced various measures to address the threat of the Corona Virus. Other than the restrictions on the attendance of international meetings already in place, additional measures include the closure of various ports of entry, including 2 sea ports and 35 land ports as of 16 March 2020, as well as travel restrictions. As high- and medium-risk countries have been identified and the status of countries changes, Travel Alerts will be issued to communicate such changes and the measures applicable.

An important clarification is that the land ports mentioned above are among the non-designated (non-commercial) border community crossings that are mainly used for passengers visiting their families across the border. SARS does not have a presence at those borders on a full time basis, only based on risk and when arrangements are made. The Department of Home Affairs (immigration) and Police are there, and these borders have been shut.

Amongst the 35 land ports that have been closed, there is only one commercial border, port – Nerston. It is at the border with Eswatini and has limited volumes of trade and passenger movement, as the nearest paper mill closed down several years ago. All 9 Nerston staff members have been redeployed to the Oshoek border post, which is still open, and about 100 km away. SARS has issued notices with information on the available alternative routes to trade.

The seaports mentioned above are Saldahna and Alexander bay. These are in the main bulk ports, and they have been closed for passenger movements. Any urgent trade-related movements can still be arranged with local authorities.

Transit trade is still accommodated.

For foreign travellers, all entry of foreign travellers with ordinary passports, travelling from, or transiting through high-risk countries, regardless of compliance with visa requirements, has been prohibited until further notice. This restriction excludes holders of diplomatic passports and travel documents issued by international organisations, as well as their family members accredited to the Republic of South Africa, and holders of official/service passports.

All other international travellers entering South Africa, including South African citizens, will be required to complete and submit the prescribed Health Form, and hand it to health officials and immigration officers upon arrival. All travellers will be subjected to medical screening for COVID-19 upon entering South Africa, and if required, can be isolated or quarantined for a minimum period of 14 days. Over and above the normal immigration requirements, entry into South Africa is subject to a passenger’s cooperation with officials conducting tests.
The safety of both Customs (and other) officials, as well as traders and travellers, is critical to SARS. SARS has therefore strongly encouraged limiting face-to-face contact with Customs officers, in line with the President’s message of greater social distancing. Traders should therefore use digital channels wherever possible. SARS has also established a Task Team comprising of relevant role-players from Occupational Health and Physical Safety, Governance and Operations, amongst others. The role of this Task Team is to formulate a comprehensive short-term plan to consider the impact of COVID-19 on all SARS employees, taxpayers and traders, who visit SARS branches and offices, and those who use the ports of entry. The SARS Wellness toll-free line also deals with queries relating to COVID-19.