



### **DRAFT PRESS RELEASE**

#### **CARICOM Competition Commission (CCC) Establishes Steering Committee to Monitor Regional Action Plan for Competition and Consumer Agencies in CARICOM to Mitigate Effects of COVID-19**

This update is further to the press release by the CCC on March 25<sup>th</sup> 2020, to inform the regional public on measures taken to support regional competition and consumer protection pursuant to the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas.

Coming off a decade of creative defences against the socio-economic impact of the aftereffects of the Great Recession of 2008/2009, natural disasters and the vagaries of fluctuating oil prices, it is recognized that the Caribbean Community (“CARICOM”) as a unit has already been hard hit these events.

The region has been and expects to be further impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Chasing its heels is yet another hurricane season and consumers and businesses alike must make ready. Added to this is the severity of the measures required for public health and safety which have directly impacted the national and regional economies. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) projects that border closures, which has impacted significantly on the tourism industries of the CARICOM, will result in a contraction of economic growth in the region by 6.2 percent in 2020. Air reservation data for the Caribbean region shows -25.4% for arrivals (excluding domestic travel) for Q1 2020 versus the same period in 2019 (UNWTO and Data Partners, April 21, 2020)

The CARICOM has at its call a number of regional and international institutions mandated to protect public health and safety standards during the pandemic. Governments are implementing fiscal policies to support businesses and cushion the vulnerable during these difficult times. However, there are not many initiatives that specifically address competition and consumer issues.

The CCC is aware that consumers in the CARICOM Member States require some form of protection against excessive price increases or product/service misinformation. There is also a need to ensure that measures taken for health and safety do not create barriers to market entry or exit, or favour one supplier or retailer over another in any market sector.



It is expected that market institutions and structures will face significant shock, aggregate or otherwise, with an expected outcome of consumers or small to medium businesses being unprepared to face the rapid measures which may be taken in response to the market shocks.

Cognizant of these developments, the CCC views the competition and consumer protection laws in the region to be more critical now more than ever before as they can help mitigate the effects of COVID-19 on commercial and consumer welfare. Promoting competitive markets through competition advocacy and enforcement can support the maintenance of fair competitors or facilitate the entry of new suppliers of essential goods in Member States, thereby reducing prices during the pandemic. Consumer laws can also help advocacy for the health and safety measures.

In this regard, the CCC, in consultation with trade, competition and consumer officials in the CARICOM, has developed a Regional Action Plan (“Plan”), with collaborative strategies for national competition and consumer protection authorities in the CARICOM during the pandemic. Some of these strategies will rely heavily on cooperation amongst national and regional institutions. The strategies are focused around three pillars: monitoring markets; competition and consumer advocacy; and competition law and consumer enforcement. Moreover, on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2020, the CCC, in partnership with regional trade, competition and consumer officials, established a Steering Committee to monitor initiatives taken by Member States, and to provide advice on key policy decisions required at the national level to implement the Plan. The Steering Committee includes, but is not limited to, representatives from the Barbados Fair Trading Commission, the Jamaica Fair Trading Commission, the Guyana Competition and Consumer Affairs Commission, the Consumer Affairs Commission of Jamaica, the Belize Bureau of Standards, and the national consumer protection agencies of Trinidad and Tobago and Saint Lucia. The Steering Committee has already approved the Action Plan and its Terms of Reference.

As the Chair of the Steering Committee, the CCC would like to inform the general public, private sector, and government authorities that their support is needed to help protect commercial and consumer welfare during this COVID-19 pandemic. As such, please communicate with your competition and consumer authorities on any activity which strikes you as deceptive, excessively priced, or anti-competitive.

The CCC has made information on laws available in each member state on its website, and will provide key linkages to critical institutions. For more information please go to <http://www.caricomcompetitioncommission.com/en/>.

Executive Director  
CARICOM Competition Commission  
Paramaribo  
Suriname  
6th May 2020