



Photo: Adam Hartman

**SWAKOP STATION** ... E-Med Rescue Namibia's station in Swakopmund is an important base for emergency services in the Erongo region. This is where ISOS' office used to be until the latter's ambulance service at the coast was discontinued after an agreement between the two companies.

# NACC probes E-Med over 'monopoly'

• ADAM HARTMAN

AN official complaint was filed at the Namibian Competition Commission (NACC) against E-Med Rescue Namibia over its alleged market manipulation and monopoly.

Although NACC corporate communications officer Dina Gowases did not give details, she told *The Namibian* that a complaint was filed in February 2013 and that it pertained to "an alleged infringement that has a bearing on fair competition in the market".

"As you are aware, two of the biggest emergency medical evacuation service providers, E-Med Rescue Namibia and I-SOS filed a merger notice on 29 October 2012 with the commission. This merger was prohibited due to the fact that it could result in certain anti-competitive practices, one being the fact that this transaction could result in a situation of market dominance in the relevant market," she said.

Unfair competition relates to any conduct within the business environment that deters other businesses to grow, or creates barriers for any entrepreneur to enter a certain market. It also entails agreements by businesses to only trade amongst themselves, allocate certain market locations to each other or fix prices to enhance the growth of their businesses at the

expense of others, as this type of conduct leads to the closure of other businesses.

"Unfortunately, the commission is not in a position to divulge more on the motivation and merits of the complaint to maintain confidentiality during its investigation process.

"Holding a dominant position is not prohibited but the abuse of that dominance by undertakings is not allowed. Unfair competition is not inherent merely because a market is monopolised but rather the abusive conduct by dominant players poses a problem," she explained.

E-Med Rescue Namibia's managing director Eddie Bezuidenhout said investigations are ongoing and their lawyers were handling the case.

He said the investigation was launched to determine if E-Med is not giving other ambulance companies the rightful opportunity to grow and develop the quality of their service delivery.

"This is not true. If you deliver a good service and more people become join you because of your good service, this, in my opinion, is not a monopoly, but rather a result of your quality service. Some people therefore had a bit of a bad taste because we are serving more clients because of our quality service and the way we manage emergency scenarios," he explained.

He said E-Med is not focused to "manipulate", but to give quality service to Namibian citizens.

There are concerns over the partnerships Namibia's medical aid services providers have entered into with E-Med.

Bezuidenhout said medical aid funds look at who can give the best service to their (the medical aids service providers') clients – and that E-Med was duly considered.

This partnership, however, did not exclude any of the other emergency services. In fact, according to him, if there was an emergency situation and any of the other ambulances were closer to the scene to help the victims, then these other services would still benefit financially from the medical aids.

"Many times we'll say that we cannot do it but there is another service that may be willing to do it, and so we give others the opportunity to follow that route, and still be paid. There is no medical fund that will not pay for an emergency service. This is where the manipulation and monopoly would come in – if we had said we have a partnership with a medical aid, and seeing that another ambulance served the client, we refuse to pay," Bezuidenhout said. "We don't do that."

As for E-Med and ISOS, there is no merger, but there is a service agreement between them.