

Press release: Western Cape Government averts chaos in already stricken ostrich industry

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Body: "Quick response and teamwork from the Western Cape Government has averted potential chaos in the Oudtshoorn Ostrich industry", Gerrit van Rensburg said today in Riversdale, Southern Cape.

The ostrich industry has been faced with an export ban on ostrich meat due to Avian Influenza since April this year, with losses amounting to R108 million per month. Forced slaughtering is required by international law on farms testing positive for the virus. To date, more than 33 000 birds have been culled in the greater Oudtshoorn area.

National Government compensated farmers for culled birds to the tune of R33 million, but on Friday (26/08) it came to light that no more money will be forthcoming from the National Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. Many farmers have already culled on the assumption they will be compensated, and farmers who were in line to cull resisted when they learned there was a R17 million shortfall in compensation funds.

The Western Cape Government Economic and Infrastructure Strategic Committee and Budget Policy Committee, chaired by Minister Alan Winde, held emergency meetings this week and recommended that the R17 million be allocated from a provincial contingency fund. This recommendation was yesterday (31/08) approved by Cabinet.

According to Winde: "The Western Cape ostrich industry contributes more than R1 billion to the region's economy and sustains 55 000 direct and indirect jobs. It is also an important earner of foreign exchange. Due to a number of external and natural factors, it has been placed under severe pressure in the last year. The decision to grant emergency funding to this industry was not taken lightly, but rather after due consideration of the causes of the problem, the value of this industry to our economy and the short- and long term implications of non-intervention. In return, we have asked the industry to devise a plan to reduce the risk of similar outbreaks in future".

Van Rensburg said international protocols require a three month disease free period after the last positive farm have been slaughtered out. It is therefore crucial to finalise the cull process as quickly as possible in order to resume exports at the earliest possible stage.

Without the required compensation funds, this process would have been indefinitely prolonged. Van Rensburg thanked his Cabinet colleagues for supporting this application, as each Department could also have argued for their financial needs to receive priority.

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