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| **Date:** | **17 January 2019** |
| **To:** | **Hon Ms S. Ntombela MPL**  **Premier: Free State Province** |
| **From:** | **Hon Dr Roy Jankielsohn MPL**  **The Leader of the Official Opposition in the Free State Provincial Legislature** |
| **Subject:** | **Free State Drought Crisis** |

Dear Hon Premier

The agricultural sector in the Free State are facing a serious crisis due to the ongoing drought in the province. All farmers, whether subsistence, emerging or commercial, are affected by the drought and crime. The drought has had a devastating impact on both stock and grain farmers with the following implications:

* Farmers have depleted financial reserves and no longer have the ability to obtain credit required to continue farming operations (buying of feed, seed, fertilizer, fuel, etc.).
* Conditions among our grain farmers, particularly in the Western Free State, are particularly dire. While livestock farmers are able to sell stock and often receive donations of feed, grain farmers experience huge expenses and have to service loan and bond repayments regardless of whether they can plant and harvest crops or not.
* Farmers are struggling, and in some unable to continue to pay salaries of employees due to the lack of income. This will add to existing socio-economic problems in rural areas and towns.
* Farmers are unable to sell or bond property to obtain additional income due to the fall of prices of agricultural land as a result of uncertainty over expropriation without compensation and the drought.
* Farmers in the province continue to lose on average between R300 000 and R400 000 per year as a result of crimes such as theft of livestock, equipment and vehicles, which has depleted reserves that could have mitigated some of the conditions caused by the drought.
* Agri-businesses that are dependent on the agricultural sector are struggling to survive and similarly face closure and job shedding.
* Due to the drought and financial crisis affecting this economic sector’s ability to produce agricultural commodities, our province and country could face serious food insecurity

Our rural local economies are dependent on the agricultural sector. Similarly, agri-businesses in rural towns depend on farmers for income. As many people are employed by agri-businesses as those directly employed on farms.

We are therefore requesting the provincial government to declare the Free State or at least parts of the province disaster areas in order to enable the province to access additional resources to assist those in need. Should such assistance be made available, it should preferably be allocated to where it can most benefit our rural communities to prevent greater unemployment and food insecurity.

Your favourable response in this regard will be appreciated.

Yours truly,

Dr Roy Jankielsohn

Member of the Free State Provincial Legislature

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