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NOKO PHINEAS MASIPA, MP SHADOW MINISTER: PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, LAND REFORM & RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Minister Thoko Didiza
Office of the Minister
184 Jeff Masemola
Pretoria
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29 September 2023

LOCAL POULTRY INDUSTRY CHALLENGES

Dear Minister Didiza

Following my telephone conversation with yourself and Director General Mr. Mooketsa Ramasodi, I hereby officially request your urgent and decisive intervention in resolving the current challenges faced by our local poultry industry. Post our discussion, a motion sponsored by the Democratic Alliance was passed unanimously in the National Council of Provinces. The motion called for urgent procurement and import of vaccines for the poultry industry. The devastating impact of the ongoing crisis is already being felt across the industry, with Namibia deciding to suspend the import of chicken and poultry meat from South Africa due to the spread of the highly pathogenic avian influenza.

According to media reports, 2 million birds died last week and the total cost to the industry is estimated to be R220 million. The concern among industry stakeholders is that communication from the Department of Agriculture Rural Development and Land Reform (DALRRD) is severely lacking on any pro-active steps to solve this problem. The exact total of the birds that has been quoted by the media to have been lost is questionable as experts are indicating that the estimated losses count to 6 million birds.

While Dr Maja's short letter does provide guidance on some items agreed with the industry, namely - following the normal registration process, notification that the use of autogenous vaccines will not be allowed and Section 21 approvals for imported, or locally unregistered vaccines will not be considered while expedited dossier review is in the process, the letter fails to provide any time frames on the proposed interventions.

Perhaps the most glaring omission, is that the letter fails to mention that the DALRRD still needs to work on the protocols for these applications and that the vaccine options must come from US and EU. This in essence eliminate the H7 subtype strain which has been more severe in South Africa than in Europe. While the DALRRD indicated the support for locally produced vaccines, this will take time and could possibly only be available next year. According to industry figures released, losses by broiler breeders, layer breeders and commercial layers are all over 20% running into millions of rands with potential huge job losses. While culling of birds is encourage, the department does not have a compensation plan the farmers.

Therefore, I appeal to you Minister to seriously consider removing some of the restrictive conditions to ensure speedy procurement of effective vaccines. Furthermore, please provide us with the exact figures of birds lost to date and whether compensation of farmers is on the cards. The chicken industry is easily the largest supplier of protein for most South Africans and any prolonged disruptions will be devastating for national nutrition. If vaccines are not secured urgently 50% of jobs in the industry are at risk. A year long wait is unsustainable, we are therefore requesting you to assist in urgently procuring the available effective vaccines, guided by both private and public sector animal health experts.

Yours sincerely



Noko Masipa, MP