



**agriculture,  
forestry & fisheries**

Department:  
Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

## **AVIAN INFLUENZA MEDIA STATEMENT**

**BY**

**MR SENZENI ZOKWANA**

**MINISTER: AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY AND FISHERIES**

**30 AUGUST 2017**

**15:30**

Members of the Media, good afternoon

The economic importance of poultry is highlighted by the fact that in the 2016 production cycle, broiler and egg production was still the largest segment of South African Agriculture in Rand value at 18%. The recent outbreaks of the H5N8 strain of Avian influenza have sent shockwaves through the poultry industry of South Africa after it was first detected on 22 June 2017.

The virus can cause big losses in poultry and it is priority to contain and eradicate the disease. Government Veterinary services, together with the poultry industry have worked tirelessly to curb the spread of disease by destroying all infected poultry. Localised outbreaks have been reported in the Highveld of Mpumalanga Province, Gauteng and recently also in Kwa-Zulu Natal, the North West and Western Cape Province. So far, twenty four outbreaks were detected; ten outbreaks in commercial chickens, three outbreaks in ostrich, three outbreaks in backyard chickens and eight outbreaks in wild birds and birds kept as a hobby.

Government and Industry are collaborating to find scientifically sound and practical ways to bring this outbreak to a halt and minimise the effect on the poultry of South Africa. Biosecurity measures that are recommended at the farm level include:

- Keeping poultry away from wetlands and areas frequented by wild birds;
- do not provide an abundance of food on properties that may attract wild birds;
- Control people access and equipment to poultry houses;
- Maintain sanitation of poultry houses and equipment;
- Avoid the introduction of birds of unknown disease status into flocks;
- Report illness and death of birds to the State veterinarians for immediate investigation
- Dispose of manure and dead poultry in a safe way.

Control of the movement of live chickens in the informal and small commercial sector has been a critical risk management measure. The Poultry Disease Management Agency (PDMA) was authorised by DAFF to register and keep records of all parties selling and buying live chickens. This is also linked to health declarations before movement of live birds in order to prevent any spread of disease and to safeguard the consumer without hampering local trade.

The strain found in the current outbreak does not cause disease in humans. Since January 2017, H5N8 has been reported in forty seven countries in Africa, Asia, Europe and Middle East with no human cases reported. The World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and World Health Organisation (WHO) have both confirmed that the H5N8 strain does not affect human beings. We have been working with the Department of Health since the first outbreak was reported; they have tested workers in the affected farms and there has not been a single case of human infections.

In my meeting with the industry on Monday; 21 August 2017, the Industry raised concerns on compensation guidelines relating to the principles and guidelines of compensating affected farms. The draft guidelines have been completed will be released to the industry and public by the 1st of September 2017.

Another big concern raised by the industry was the issue of vaccination against the Avian Influenza. We all agree that this is not a simple discussion that can be taken lightly. It is a decision that should be based on scientific research for the long term benefit of the sector and the country. We set up a task team consisting of representatives from industry and Government to work on scientifically based considerations regarding vaccination.

The first proposal was received by my team from the poultry interest group of vets recently and forms the basis of discussions. Detailed update will be communicated by end of September 2017.

The industry also requested to be given permission to import fertile eggs to close the supply gap as a result of culled birds. We have received several requests which we are considering.

We are conducting thorough risk assessment in order to avoid exposing the country to other disease risks. The basic work has been conducted and there are two options which have been presented to the poultry industry. The first option is for the risk mitigation to be conducted in South Africa through stringent quarantine measures on arrival of the hatching eggs from their country of origin.

The second option will be for stringent quarantine measures in the country of origin where the eggs will come from compartments free of specified diseases that DAFF will approve, with less stringent post arrival quarantine measures. A request for measures applied for compartments has been sent to Brazil, and we are awaiting this information. The requests can only be considered for imports from Avian Influenza free countries as well as those which South Africa currently imports from.

The Government is committed to support the poultry sector in South Africa. Negotiations are ongoing to find a way to provide an incentive to farmers who have experienced massive losses due to destruction of healthy birds and eggs in an effort to eradicate the disease.

Negotiations with international trade partners are ongoing to ensure a continuation of trade from disease free compartments with special biosecurity measures as well as the export of fresh ostrich meat from a closed holding.

The continued cooperation of the public and the poultry industry, in the timeous reporting of sick and dying birds to the Government veterinary services is vital for the effectiveness of disease control and we therefore thank the public and the poultry industry for their support. I THANK YOU.