



KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCE
AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

MEDIA STATEMENT

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MEC THEMBENI KAMADLOPHA-MTHETHWA ASSESSES THE DAMAGES AT THE KOKSTAD RESEARCH STATION DUE TO VELDFIRES

The specter of veldfires in KwaZulu-Natal has once again reared its ugly head, leaving farmers devastated and counting their losses. This time, an essential power infrastructure belonging to the Provincial Department of Agriculture and Rural Development was affected. This sub-station which powers the Research Station of Agriculture in Kokstad under Harry Gwala District and two adjacent farms bore the brunt of the runaway fires in the early hours of Friday morning.

Veldfires destroyed about 700 hectares of grazing land and 58 bales, resulting in 56 percent of the damage to the affected farms and the research farm. In July alone, the Greater Kokstad area experienced three fires, which resulted in the agricultural losses estimated at R22 million. The extent of the damage and the loss in the agricultural sector in the District prompted MEC Thembeni kaMadlopha-Mthethwa to ensure the Department institutes some control measures to prevent further fires. "We need to erect a mini fire station in the District to fight against these fires because it comes without any warning. It is important for us to prepare ourselves to fight against the veldfires in our research institutions." said kaMadlopha-Mthethwa.

KaMadlopha-Mthethwa also urged the community not to throw cigarette butts and burn fires around such institutions, as this will have a negative impact on research results and food security.

The battle against the Friday morning fires saw firefighters from Working On Fire crew, response teams and Kokstad Disaster Management unit being dispatched to assist the local farming community in distress. The fires were perpetuated by strong winds, which traveled at a speed of 27 km per hour. It was eventually contained later in the day. The farming community has decried a serious shortage of staff to fight the fires and battling cases of arson attacks from trespassers around the farms. According to the farmers, this is the second most devastating fire since 2019.

No casualties or livestock have been reported. Authorities say while investigations continue to find the cause of the fire, suspected arson attack cannot be ruled out.

The veldfires continue to threaten the livelihoods of the farmers in the Province. Last month, six firefighting crew lost their lives while fighting the blaze in Boston near

eMpophomeni in the Midlands and it caused an estimated R93 million losses from dead livestock and burnt feed.

KaMadlopha-Mthethwa commended the firefighting crews from the Disaster Management teams and Working On Fire for their efforts that spared the rest of the farms from a near calamity of losing all the farms and their essential infrastructure as well as the livestock. KaMadlopha-Mthethwa urged locals to also play their part in ensuring the safety of the farms. She said that it was observed that the area has people performing their cultural and religious rituals by lighting candles that are left unattended.

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