

# Trouble at Mooi River

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## Farmers support workers who use fire to protest alleged ill treatment

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A FARM in the Mooi River area said to belong to Durban business tycoon Roy Moodley is at the centre of protests by farmworkers who alleging ill treatment at the hands of the farm manager.

Mooi-Mpofana Agricultural Association trustee Graham Armstrong yesterday said the farm belonged to Moodley, the owner of Royal Security, who is a confidante and backer of President Jacob Zuma.

Farmworkers accused the manager of impounding their cattle, cutting off their water supply and destroying one of their homes, among other allegations.

In an unusual development, neighbouring farmers around Royal Farming's Worley Commons Farm have rallied around the protesting farmworkers, saying they did not agree with the management's treatment of the staff.

"None of the other farmers agree with the way staff on the Worley Commons farm are being treated and are actually supportive of the staff and their grievances," said one, who would not be named.

The source said a few farmers had been threatened by staff and there were concerns that their farms would be set alight, until the farmers explained that they also disagreed with the way the staff were being treated.

Armstrong said staff had burnt part of the Worley Commons farm on Tuesday night in protest against the water cut-offs and impounding of cattle, but the farm had not been severely damaged.

"As the Mooi-Mpofana Agricultural Association, we are in contact with all parties concerned and believe things will progress peacefully.

"The organisation ... will act as the mediator in this situation.

"Our organisation likes things to be done fairly and have everyone treated equally, and supports transformation in our area," he said.

Attempts to reach Moodley proved unsuccessful yesterday.

The farm manager said he would speak to *The Witness* today.

The farmworkers yesterday said they want Kydle gone.

About 50 marchers gathered outside the farm yesterday, hoping to hand their memorandum of complaints and requests to Kydle, who was nowhere to be seen.

"He refused to speak to us. We ended



On the same side: Local farmers rallied to support aggrieved farm workers as Mooi-Mpofana Agricultural Association trustee Graham Armstrong (centre right) and Gcina Shabalala (Mooi River Landless People's Movement) mediate a dispute on a Mooi River farm owned by a Durban tycoon.

**PHOTO: IAN CARBUTT**

up giving the memorandum to Armstrong, who told us that he would rather give it to the farm owner himself than giving it to [the farm manager]," said Gcina Shabalala, the Landless People's Movement Mooi River chairperson.

Staff alleged that the farm manager had 32 of their cattle and 24 of their goats

impounded. Dumisani Ngobese said he was told to pay R100 000 to get his 10 cows back. "To me it did not make sense. We usually sell a cow for around R7 000 or R8 000. To tell me to fork out R100 000 for 10 cows is insane," he said.

Ngobese said he first came to the area to look for land 25 years ago.

"We had no land. The previous owner gave us permission to build houses. Because we were poor, we built mud houses. After a while he told us that our houses were unsafe and moved us to one of his unoccupied houses.

"He let us buy our own livestock. He said the farm was big enough for our live-

stock to graze on," said Ngobese, who alleged that the farm manager had re-trenched them.

Local farmers expressed disappointment at the farm manager's handling of the volatile situation.

"We have tried to speak to him, but he does not listen to us," said Armstrong.

Armstrong said they had engaged Agriculture MEC Cyril Xaba.

"He definitely supports our efforts to bring peace to the area," he said.

Department of Rural Development and Land Affairs legal officer Fanyana Nzuza said they would meet with the farm owner on Friday to resolve this issue.

"We are prepared to negotiate with him, no matter how much the price might be. We want to deal with this once and for all," he said.

## ILLEGAL IMPOUNDING OF ANIMALS MUST BE ADDRESSED

ASSOCIATION for Rural Advancement director Laurel Oettle said yesterday there had been a history in the country of illegal impounding of animals, an ongoing issue that needed to be addressed by municipalities.

"It is illegal to just evict someone, so other means are used to try and

force people off farms.

"We hear too many of these stories and understand the frustration and dramatic impact it has on their [farmworkers'] lives.

"We will be following this up and offer the farm dwellers all the support we can offer," she said.

KZN Agricultural Union (KwaNalu) director Sandy la Marque said such incidents "are isolated and we hope that this will be resolved through mediation and not through conflict".

She said KwaNalu supported mediation and hoped the matter would be resolved peacefully and fairly.