



agriculture & rural development

Department:
agriculture
& rural development
PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

The Mercury, 05 November 2015, Front
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THIRSTY AND ANGRY



Angry residents protest on the main road linking Jozini to the N2 about water not being delivered. Some residents walk 8km to get water. The tar road was reopened late yesterday afternoon after tankers delivered water, but another road remained blocked. PICTURE: TWITTER/ALIVE ARRIVE FULL STORY: P2

Drought runs into KZN funding disaster

Tony Carnie

MORE than 100 000 farm animals have died, crops are wilting and water is running out across the province – yet the national government says KwaZulu-Natal officials have failed to submit the necessary paperwork to tap into millions of rands of drought relief funds.

The national Department of Agriculture sparked outrage and confusion following a media statement yesterday that it was “yet to receive written confirmation of disaster declaration in KZN” and that official records of disaster declarations were essential to unlock National Treasury funding.

Lennox Mabaso, spokesman for the provincial Department of Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs, insisted that a drought disaster in KZN was proclaimed in the provincial government gazette on November 17 last year – but he could throw no further light last night on what paperwork was needed by the national depart-

ment. “The province has done everything according to the book. There was a comprehensive report to National Disaster Management Centre, which provided this information to relevant departments, such as Agriculture and Water.”

Adding to the confusion, provincial cabinet spokesman Thami Ngwenya appeared to confirm that certain documents to access drought funding remained outstanding from some municipalities and districts earlier this year, and that Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs had been tasked to lead a process to resolve the matter.

Officials from the national Department of Agriculture did not respond to repeated calls from The Mercury seeking clarity on what paperwork was outstanding and who was responsible for the apparent bureaucratic bungle.

Farmers’ union Kwanalu said it was “disappointed that something that affects the livelihoods of hundreds of thousands appears to have

been treated rather lightly”.

Annette Steyn, the DA spokeswoman on agriculture, has called for an urgent debate in Parliament to clarify the issue and establish what is being done to alleviate the plight of KZN farmers.

“This is a shocking state of affairs. I visited the Hluhluwe area earlier this week and there is absolutely no grazing for cattle. We have also had disturbing reports that agriculture officials in KZN are not prepared to distribute drought relief forms.

“I’m not sure whether this is negligence or someone forgetting to fill out the necessary forms to access drought relief – or is it rather a case of officials actually believing there is not a drought problem, or simply that there is no Treasury money available.”

In a media statement the national Department of Agriculture said it had received “declaration confirmations” from the North West and Free State provinces but was “yet to receive written confirmation of dis-

aster declaration from KZN”.

“In the meantime the provincial Department of Agriculture provided drought relief assistance to the aggregate amount of R14.7 million to small-scale and subsistence farmers.”

The department had also approached the Industrial Development Corporation and the Land Bank to discuss assistance plans.

Sandy la Marque, the chief executive of Kwanalu, said she understood that the drought disaster declaration by Premier Senzo Mchunu had lapsed. The November declaration also appeared to have been restricted to emergency water provision – but not specific drought relief to farmers.

Kwanalu had been engaging with the KZN Agriculture Department for more than a year to help compile assessments on the drought relief measures needed.

“We hear stories that more than R342 million has been allocated to KZN – but how much of this money has been spent?”