



Wes-Kaapse Provinsiale Parlement Western Cape Provincial Parliament IPalamente yePhondo leNtshona Koloni

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Report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture, Economic Development and Tourism on the 2023/24 Annual Reports of the Department of Agriculture, and its Entity Casidra, for the year ended 31 March 2024.

The Standing Committee on Agriculture, Economic Development and Tourism, having deliberated on the Annual Reports of the Department of Agriculture and its Entity, Casidra, for the year ended 31 March 2024, referred to it, reports as follows:

1. Introduction

Section 113(3)(b) of the Constitution requires that “Members of the Executive Council of a province must provide the legislature with full and regular reports concerning matters under their control.” Section 65 of the Public Finance Management Act, 1999 (Act 1 of 1999) requires the Minister of each department and public entity to table an annual report in the legislature within six months of the end of each financial year.

As part of its oversight function, the Standing Committee on Agriculture, Economic Development and Tourism (the Committee) deliberated on the Annual Reports of the Department of Agriculture (the Department) and its Entity, Casidra, on 28 October 2024.

Annual reports are the key instruments for departments to report on performance measured against their performance targets and budgets as outlined in their Strategic Plans and Annual Performance Plans.

The Annual Report Programme for the 2023/2024 financial year was advertised in various newspapers, inviting stakeholders and members of the public to participate in the discussions.

The Committee deliberated on Part A: General Information, Part B: Performance Information and Part D: Human Resource Management of the respective Annual Reports.

2. Department of Agriculture

2.1 Overview

Each year in agriculture presented unique challenges, as it operated within a complex biological system that interacted with both local and international factors. In the Western Cape, where 55% of agricultural output is exported, global dynamics had significant implications on the sector. Challenges experienced included intensified delays and inefficiencies at the ports, rising crime, deteriorating rail and road infrastructure, rising

protectionism in key export markets and increased geopolitical uncertainty. The approved organisational structure ideally required approximately 1 600 staff members to support agriculture in the province, yet, as highlighted in the annual report, the Department operated at around 843 staff members, only about half of the necessary capacity to meet its objectives for Western Cape residents.

Despite these variables, the Department achieved 95% of its performance targets. A notable accomplishment given the department's capacity challenges. This achievement was largely possible due to strategic partnerships with industry and corporate agriculture within the province.

The Department utilised approximately 98,52% of its budget allocation, reflecting its commitment to fiscal responsibility. There were no audit findings, underscoring the Department's adherence to high standards of governance.

The Department invested approximately R30 million to revamp its provincial veterinary laboratory, which was vital for the economy and, more importantly, for food safety. Due to the efforts of the Department and support from private veterinarians, there were no reported food safety incidents in the Western Cape during the year under review.

In terms of food security, the Department supported approximately 4 000 food gardens across the province, an essential initiative as many citizens still faced food access challenges. This Programme not only addressed food availability but also fostered a sense of self-worth and independence as individuals were able to grow and harvest their own food.

The Department also provided advisory support to approximately 4 300 farmers across the Western Cape, demonstrating its commitment to sustainable agricultural development.

2.2 Key issues discussed

2.2.1 The Committee raised concern with regards to the exploitation of undocumented foreign nationals, their safety and the compliance of all sectors to legal requirements in this regard.

During the financial year under review, the Department held a workshop that focused on this issue, which included participants from the Department of Employment and Labour, the Department of Home Affairs, the South African Police Services, agricultural stakeholders, and international organisations such as the International Labour Organisation. The workshop addressed the complexities surrounding the employment of foreign nationals. In collaboration with the Department of Employment and Labour, the Department developed a practical guideline for employing foreign nationals, which was distributed to all agricultural stakeholders to assist them in navigating the employment processes.

While the enforcement of proper recruitment practices falls outside of the Department's mandate, the partnerships that were established, particularly with the Department of Employment and Labor, facilitated this process and ensured that the Department fulfilled its responsibilities regarding enforcement and compliance.

The Department remained committed to fair labour practices in South Africa and to implementing the practical guidelines for employing foreign nationals in the agricultural sector. This matter had a direct impact on the agricultural exports, as exports must comply

with international standards for fair labour practices, and failure to adhere to these standards could prevent the Department from exporting to other countries.

- 2.2.2 Crop cultivation was possible on only approximately 2 million hectares (15,45%) of the Western Cape's total land area, making it essential to evaluate and comment on subdivision and/or rezoning applications to protect productive agricultural areas. This work was critical to achieving integrated, optimal land management, which balanced land and resource use for production with conservation priorities to prevent the fragmentation of agricultural land.

The Land Use Management sub-programme assessed land-use change applications and provided recommendations that approval authorities were required to consider. The growing complexity of these applications underscored increasing pressure on agricultural land, highlighting the need to build enhanced capacity for effectively managing these more intricate requests. Cooperative governance among the Land Use Management sub-programme, provincial departments, and local authorities was well established.

In spatial planning and land use applications, collaboration between provincial and local authorities, the Department, and the national Department of Agriculture, Land Reform, and Rural Development proved effective, especially with input from steering committees. The Land Use Management sub-programme reviewed and provided feedback on 684 applications for the subdivision and rezoning of agricultural land in the year under review.

The Committee raised concern regarding the risks associated with the loss of agricultural land, as it was evident that it was currently facing significant pressure. This pressure was exemplified by the growth of lifestyle estates, among other factors. The Department was committed to protecting agricultural land. Important to note was that the authority for spatial planning and land use management resided with municipalities under the Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act, 2013 (Act 16 of 2013) (SPLUMA). While the Department's role was primarily that of a commenting authority, the Committee was pleased to be informed that the Department's input was highly valued and considered, although not always fully accepted or acted upon, and that the Department's position was well understood within municipal structures.

- 2.2.3 A substantial portion of the agricultural engineering support activities provided a focus on agricultural water use and irrigation. Emphasis was placed on water quality and availability. The Department played a crucial role in developing the Western Cape Water Resilience Plan, implementing the Western Cape Sustainable Water Management Plan, and executing the Berg River Improvement Plan (BRIP). The BRIP was designed to enhance the water quality of the Berg River and improve the livelihoods of the communities along its 260 km stretch. The Agricultural Engineering Services sub-programme was a key participant in the newly adopted Western Cape Water Resilience Plan, ensuring agricultural water security in collaboration with the Department of Environmental Affairs and Development Planning, as well as the Department of Local Government. To avoid duplication of efforts, the BRIP and the Western Cape Sustainable Water Management Plan had been discontinued.

The Committee raised concern that, although the Department provided support for agricultural water use and irrigation agriculture, particularly through its involvement in water care projects, which included the management of invasive alien species and rehabilitation efforts and collaborating with the Department of Local Government and the Department of Environmental Affairs and Development Planning to implement the province's water resilience plan, municipalities did not utilise their grant funding in this regard effectively.

3. Casidra

3.1 Overview

Casidra played a key role in assisting the Department with the rollout of its comprehensive agricultural support program and the Ilima/Letsema Food Security Programme. This included project management services for rural agricultural infrastructure, agricultural initiatives, and disaster support projects, with projects valued at R6,4 million.

Casidra completed around 10,000 food security projects, trained over 4,000 farmers, and partnered with the Breede-Olifants Catchment Management Agency (BOCMA) to install rainwater harvest tanks and infrastructure across five rural districts in the Western Cape. BOCMA, responsible for water resource management in the Breede-Olifants area, collaborated with Casidra to manage and protect water resources, completing installations worth approximately R2,5 million.

Supporting its vision of fostering self-sustaining communities, Casidra implemented thousands of community and household food security projects, provided disaster management funds to farmers in distress, offered financial record-keeping assistance to small farmers, and delivered boreholes, water tanks, and solar power access to beneficiaries.

3.2 Key issue discussed

Casidra's strategic focus included managing the Amalienstein and Waaikraal government farms sustainably, aiming to make them profitable before they were handed over to prospective community entities. Under contract with the Department until March 2025, Casidra may extend its role depending on community intervention outcomes. To facilitate community engagement, the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation was instrumental in preparing for a smooth handover.

Currently, the farms faced challenges due to limited resources, with Casidra actively seeking additional funding sources. Water management at Waaikraal has improved, though the farm's damaged dam infrastructure remained a major concern. Farming operations included lucerne, onion seed production, and dairy management, with both farms employing a mix of contract, casual, and government workers. Despite incidents of theft, vandalism, and stray animals, Casidra has engaged with the local community and built strong relationships with smallholder farmers to address these issues and maintain operations.

Despite these challenges, the Department and Casidra were committed to finding solutions for these farms.

4. Resolutions/Actions

4.1. The Committee RESOLVED that it would:

4.1.1 Invite the national Department of Employment and Labour and the Department of Agriculture to brief it on their efforts to address recurring issues in respect of the employment of foreign nationals in the agricultural sector, with the aim of clarifying actions taken and dispelling any unsubstantiated rumours;

- 4.1.2 Invite the Department of Agriculture to, after it has concluded its upcoming summit with municipalities, brief it on the current status of land use management, including land rezoning for various purposes, the current risks to preserving agricultural land within the province, and the contributing factors that may emanate from the upcoming summit. This will be linked to the Department's readiness for the implementation of the Preservation and Development of Agricultural Land Bill (B8-2021); and
- 4.1.3 Undertake an oversight visit to the Amalienstein and Waaikraal farms to assess the progress made in relation to Casidra's turnaround strategies so as to gain firsthand insight into the developments and Casidra's timeline for the project to reach break-even for eventual handover to the community.

5. Conclusion

The Committee recognised the challenges experienced during the year, especially the budgetary constraints, and congratulated the Department and Casidra on sterling working under difficult circumstances. The Committee was satisfied that the predetermined objectives for the 2023/24 financial year were adequately achieved and that they were accurately reported.



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CHAIRPERSON: STANDING COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM

DATE: 15 November 2024