

15 January 2026

## THE NATIONAL RPO'S REACTION ON THE NATIONAL STRATEGY ON FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE

Dear Producer

The National Red Meat Producers' Organisation (RPO) took note of the media briefing by the Minister of Agriculture, Mr John Steenhuisen, on 14 January 2026, where he outlined the proposed national strategy for containing Foot-and-Mouth disease. The RPO hereby expresses its sincere gratitude to the Department of Agriculture for its efforts in addressing this crisis in the livestock industry.

The RPO welcomes any strategy to try and curb and address the devastating outbreak of FMD. However, while the Minister and Dr Mogajane outlined the vision of what they want to achieve, and promised that a detailed plan would be shared, the confusion and uncertainty regarding the road forward remain.

Since the media briefing, the RPO has received a multitude of queries from producers who are as confused at this stage as they were previously. While we understand that the media briefing outlined the broad framework of the strategy, the devil is in the details, and that is what is needed now.

We agree with most of what was said during the media briefing, but the reality is that it seems more like a wish list. Everything mentioned is a goal that we want to achieve, discussions that will take place, and dates by which things should happen, but no concrete plan is on the table yet.

Secondly, and this is a real concern for producers, is that it seems as if the Department is not in touch with the situation on the ground level. The mention of the Eastern Cape, where FMD is currently under control, is a good example, as there have been four confirmed new outbreaks and ten more for which results are pending.

It was mentioned that consultations with industry did take place, but we are not aware of any consultative meetings with the major commodity organisations in the livestock sector. Another example is the assertion that claims of vaccine unavailability in the country are false. It is a well-known fact that no vaccines are available for use by the Department (if there were, vaccinations would have taken place in affected regions). The only available vaccines are those that were privately purchased and paid for by the feedlots and the Milk Producers' Organisation (MPO).

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The Minister also announced that the Ministerial Task Team will report directly to the Livestock Value Chain Round Table (LVCRT). The RPO is part of the LVCRT, and to date, no report has been given. During the September meeting, it was not even mentioned, and although the December meeting was cancelled a day before the scheduled time, it was not included on the agenda. While senior members of the Department, who should be dealing with FMD, are part of the LVCRT, I recall no instance where they attended, provided feedback, or requested input on FMD since the LVCRT's inception.

A major concern for producers is that no mention was made of how and when regulations will change to allow market access during the new path of vaccinating the entire country. While it was said that animal movement control will be stricter and auctions can only take place if animals stem from “free zones,” the question remains what this means. Currently, a free zone is defined as an area where FMD has not been previously detected, or where affected properties were quarantined for approximately a year and subsequently tested and found to be free of the disease. Will this remain the case, or will vaccinated regions and animals be considered as “free”? The same question can be asked about abattoirs. While specific mention was made about feedlots and export abattoirs, how will producers, whose animals were vaccinated, go about slaughtering them directly? Under the current regulations, it can only be done at an FMD-registered abattoir.

The RPO is not an organisation that runs to the media with every issue we have; instead, we try to come up with workable solutions and work together to move forward. Unfortunately, not many of our previous pleas were taken up. Although we had meetings with the Department and provided suggestions that they agreed to, these suggestions were never implemented. An example is that, in April 2025, we requested relocating the KZN DMA border by 2 kilometres to exclude the abattoir at New Castle, allowing producers outside the DMA to continue slaughtering. The Department said it can be done the next day, but we are still waiting.

When the virus started to spread, before the Indaba in July 2025, we asked that market access for affected producers should be prioritised, as more and more producers would not have a source of income. We requested that a vaccination-to-slaughter policy be implemented through feedlots, which were willing to participate as they were also infected; however, to date, it has not been implemented.

In August 2025, the National RPO stated that FMD is out of control and that immediate attention should be given to the matter. The Department, however, brushed us off by disagreeing and stating that we should rather tell our members to follow the rules, as it is the illegal movement of animals that spreads the disease. However, three months later, the Minister announced that the whole country must be vaccinated, and during the latest media briefing, it was declared a state of disaster.

While we can write pages on concerns, confusions, and mishaps, it will not take us forward. One thing that we did arrange, and that, by the current state of affairs, seems to be a success, was the meeting between the MTT and Biogenesis Bago (the vaccine manufacturer from Argentina). It is, however, quite ironic that we need to hear it on a media briefing by the Department. A little feedback after the meeting, which the RPO arranged, would have gone a long way.

We also had to step in and assist at the provincial level when the government lacked the capacity to provide certain functions. The movement permit systems in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal are good examples where organised agriculture had to, and still does, provide the function.

Small successes to assist producers with functions that should have been government-controlled.

The National RPO remain willing to work with the government and industry to find solutions and implement actions to bring an end to FMD.

We again urge the government to open up communication, not just through press releases or briefings every month or two, but on a weekly or bi-weekly basis, providing factual information on our current status, the challenges and successes we are facing, and the anticipated timelines. We need to review and engage with proposed regulations, working together to ensure they are practically implementable while serving their intended purpose.

We urge the government to involve producers through their respective representative organisations directly, not just their veterinarians. To prioritise market access for the affected red meat producer, as no one can survive without it. To determine the needs of those already suffering without income for long periods, and together come up with options to assist them to bridge the gap. When small businesses struggled during the COVID-19 pandemic, the government and private sector provided relief funds to support them. How are we going to do it to protect our producers?

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