**THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**QUESTIONS FOR WRITTEN REPLY**

**1747. Ms A Steyn (DA) to ask the Minister of Trade and Industry:**

(1) Whether, with reference to his undertaking during the joint sitting of the portfolio committees on Health, Trade and Industry and Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries on 28 March 2018, that his department would provide rehabilitation relief to businesses in the meat processing industry that are in distress, he and/or any senior official within his department have met with the specified businesses to understand their needs; if not, why not; if so, what were the findings;

(2) whether his department conducted a full analysis of the impact the listeriosis outbreak had on the (a) meat processing industry and (b) rest of the value chain with respect to (i) job losses and (ii) revenue losses; if not, why not in each case; if so, what were the findings in each case;

(3) (a) what is his policy position on the establishment of an independent food health and safety agency to align all areas of food handling and manufacturing regulation and (b) what action will he take to support the existence of such an agency?

**Response:**

1. The lead Department for health and food safety is the Department of Health. Once the National Institute for Communicable Diseases had established the existence of listeriosis in South African meat processing plants the National Consumer Commission issued a recall notice under the provisions of the National Consumer Commission (NCC) and in the over-riding interests of public health.

**thedti** has an existing agro-processing incentive to which companies in the meat sector can apply. Each application will be dealt with on its merits including with respect to whether or not the company has raised food safety and health standards and commits to raising competitiveness. Senior officials from the Department of Trade and Industry have met with the South African Meat Processors Association (SAMPA) where this was explained.

1. **thedti** has conducted a preliminary economic analysis of the impact the listeriosis outbreak on the meat processing industry. This preliminary analysis will be followed up with a more comprehensive study to determine the wider economic and employment impact. Preliminary research to date suggests that the pork industry is the hardest hit. The demand for processed meat has dropped by 75% and the demand for pork cold cuts by 50%, with an estimated decline in profits of 40%. According to data from the Pork Producer’s Organization, two plants and one abattoir have closed down.
2. (a) **thedti** fully supports the formation of a Food Safety Agency and at the time of the outbreak immediately instructed the National Regulator for Compulsory Specifications (NRCS) to begin the process to develop the requisite regulation.

(b) The South African Constitution provides for food safety control as a concurrent function, across national government departments and at provincial and local government levels. The Departments of Agriculture, Health and Trade and Industry have existing concurrent functions to enhance food safety and consumer protection with the Department of Health as the lead department.

The fact that some part of the private sector allowed a highly deleterious lowering of standards in food safety, points to the need for a strengthened and consolidated approach by government. It is for this reason that the dti is working with the Department of Health, Department of Forestry and Fisheries other national departments and the National Regulatory for Compulsory Standards (NRCS) to establish a Food Safety Agency, with an attendant regulatory framework.

Government’s view is that the long term sustainability of the food sector and its ability to safeguard jobs, rests on an optimal health and safety standards regulatory framework, and enforcement by government.