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| MEMORANDUM FROM THE PARLIAMENTARY OFFICE |

**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**FOR WRITTEN REPLY**

**QUESTION 200**

**DATE OF PUBLICATION OF INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER: 12/07/2019**

**INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER NO 04 OF 2019**

**DR WJ BOSCHOFF (FF PLUS) to ask the Minister of Higher Education, Science and Technology:**

1. Whether he has been informed of the socio-economic and environmental implications of the Square Kilometre Array (SKA) project; if not, why not; if so, what (a) steps has he taken to address the negative impact of the withdrawal of an estimated 16 000 ewes from production, (b) investment has been made by both the Government and SKA South Africa to minimize the resultant loss of permanent jobs in the local meat production and processing industry, as well as other supporting businesses and (c) measures are being taken to ensure the survival of affected species that have been dependent on watering points previously provided and maintained by farmers on the land currently occupied by the SKA project;
2. Whether he will make a statement on the matter?

**NW 1156E**

**REPLY:**

1. The Minister has been briefed about the SKA project.
2. Impact studies have been conducted for all phases of the project. A Strategic Environmental Impact (SEI) assessment of the area was conducted in 2015/16 for SKA Phase 1. This assessment encompassed various specialist studies that included a socio-economic assessment, an agricultural economic assessment, and several environmental assessments, these studies were all incorporated into the Environmental Management Plan (EMP) for the project. These documents are publicly available on the CSIR and NRF websites. The EMP that was composed as a result of the SEI assessment was signed by the Minister of Environmental Affairs and gazetted on 22 March 2019. The South African Radio Astronomy Observatory (SARAO) collaborates with organised agriculture to ensure that steps taken to counteract any negative impact that the project activities may have on farming activities are supported by the farming community. In addition, the project representatives interact with national, provincial, and local farming unions, as well as with individual farmers. Through this process of consultation and interactions, three projects have been identified that would ensure that the impact of livestock withdrawn from production would be mitigated and that possible negative effects are alleviated. It is standard practice that SARAO also review and consider any other suggestions and/or proposals from organised agriculture on sustainable initiatives to support agriculture in the area.
3. Several approaches have been adopted, in collaboration with different government departments and universities, to circumvent the impact on the meat processing industry by creating solutions to improve on environmental sustainability and creating new jobs. Two projects aimed at improving the overall sustainability of the red meat industry are being implemented. SARAO is collaborating with the Williston Cooperative to establish a feedlot that will contribute to sustainable supply of sheep to the local abattoir. The feedlot was constructed at a cost of R3.5 million, of which R2.4 million was financed by SARAO, and it now contains 3 300 sheep. This project created 4 new jobs but also ensured the sustainability of jobs by providing a consistent supply of livestock to the abattoir. As a result of this initiative, the Northern Cape Department of Agriculture Rural Development and Land Reform has since joined the project and has committed to developing an offal processing plant in Williston, on land provided by the Karoo Hoogland Municipality. In addition to this, ten youth from the Williston area are in college for meat processing training as part of the National Rural Youth Service Corps programme. In addition, SARAO is also in negotiations with the Carnarvon Kaap Landbou Korporasie (KLK) Abattoir on the development of a project that could also contribute to sustainability of the local meat processing industry.
4. The land procured by SARAO will be declared a national park and this process is underway. When this process is completed, SANPARKS will manage the surface water on the reserve. However, since the process has not yet concluded, a local farmer from Carnarvon was appointed four months ago, to ensure that all water pumps on the SKA land are operational and to monitor the water level of the surface dams. SARAO also supports the studies by the University of Cape Town on small mammal and predator that could assist the industry with the management of Jackal and Caracal, territorial wild animals that predominantly hunt livestock in the area with the ultimate objective of increasing livestock yields. In addition, Rhodes University and SANPARKS are collaborating with farmers on the management of Prosopus and other invasive species in the area that are responsible for depleting the underground water supply. These aspects will later be managed by SANParks and the studies will assist in optimizing farming activities in the area.
5. The Minister will not be making a statement on this issue, the Department and the NRF have put in place a communications strategy that keeps the public informed about developments in the SKA project.