**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**WRITTEN REPLY**

**QUESTION 2815 / NW 3122E**

**MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY AND FISHERIES:**

**Mr P van Dalen (DA) to ask the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries:**

**QUESTION:**

(1)  Has his department’s fisheries management service contract related to the provision of stock assessment advice been re-activated since the previous contract expired in March 2017; if not, (a) why not and (b) what interim arrangements have been made to carry on with this work; if so, what are the relevant details;

(2)  Has his department developed any clear plans to build capacity in the specified area; if not, why not; if so, what are the details?  **NW3122E**

**REPLY:**

(1) (a) There is, unfortunately, no provision in the public service for such a contract to be ‘re-activated’. The stock assessment service must be procured through the prescribed supply chain processes. The department has been working hard to make sure that such a service is procured. As a result, the prescribed supply chain process is currently underway to procure stock assessment services.

(b) In the interim, FishSA has arranged for the Department’s stock assessment requirements to be met and provided to the Department by the previous contract holder. FishSA, whose members benefit immensely from the sustainable management of fishery resources by the Department, thought is prudent to maintain the same level of expertise and close the gap whilst the Department follows the prescribed supply chain processes to secure an expert stock assessment service provider.

(2) The Department is currently working on a plan to develop capacity in this area. The plan entails up-skilling of existing staff in fisheries stock assessment as appropriate, and creating new posts to which young scientists can be appointed and fully trained to be able to undertake fisheries stock assessments. However, the current situation of severe budget cuts makes it impossible to train new people as the Department lacks the necessary funding to cover the Cost of Employee (CoE) budget needed for the creation of the appropriate posts.