**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**WRITTEN REPLY**

**QUESTION 3067 / NW 3383E**

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

**Ms A Steyn (DA) to ask the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries:**

**QUESTION:**

1. What are the details of all current outbreaks of diseases that are affecting (a) animals and (b) plants in the country;
2. whether any of the specified diseases are new to the country; if so, (a) what are the relevant details and (b) how are the specified diseases spreading;
3. what measures has his department put in place to address each specified disease

outbreak?              NW3383E

**REPLY:**

**(1)** In terms of plant diseases affecting the country, the Department focuses on surveillance for early detection of alien fruit flies as these have been identified as the priority pest in the production and trade of fruit commodities, and on monitoring quarantine / new pests of potential negative economic significance that have entered the country. Details of these new and current plant pest/ diseases are provided in (2) below.

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI-H5N8) is the most significant animal disease outbreak currently affecting animals in South Africa.  The outbreak started in June 2017 and has affected commercial and backyard chickens, ostriches, hobby birds and wild birds in all provinces, with the exception of Northern Cape and Limpopo.  A total of 79 outbreaks were reported, with 50 in Western Cape, 13 in Gauteng, 11 in Mpumalanga, 2 in North West and 1 each in Free State, Kwa-Zulu Natal and Eastern Cape.

There is also an outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) in cattle in the Giyani district of Limpopo Province, which was detected in August 2017.  This area is within the FMD protection zone, which is part of the FMD controlled area and does not affect the internationally recognised FMD free zone status of South Africa.  A similar outbreak occurred in Bushbuckridge district in Mpumalanga in March 2017 and was brought under control by the Mpumalanga Veterinary Services.

**(2)** The following specified plant pests/ diseases are new to the country*:*

**i. Banana Bunchy Top Virus (BBTV):** It is a serious pest of bananas and was detected in South Africa in 2015; it is known to occur only in the Hibberdene area in KwaZulu-Natal. The Agricultural Research Council (ARC) and growers are continuing with surveys; DAFF has issued official orders to affected land users where this disease is present, prohibiting them to remove plant propagation material from the area. There is no cure so infected plants must be destroyed. The occurrence of this pest has been notified internationally via the International Phytosanitary Portal (IPP) of the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC), and directly to the National Plant Protection Organisation (NPPO) of each neighbouring country.

**ii. *Brevipalpus lewisi* (the Citrus flat mite):** Although this was detected in South Africa in 2014/15, this pest has probably been in this country much longer. It has been detected only on grape (Vitis spp) rootstocks and only in some nurseries in the Western and Northern Cape provinces. DAFF conducted surveys in 2015/16, and issued official orders regarding propagation material. Propagating material must be clean and free from this pest. This is not considered a serious pest and eradication is not possible. The occurrence of this pest has been notified internationally via the IPP of the IPPC, and directly to the NPPO of each neighbouring country.

**iii. *Raoiella indica* (the Red Palm Mite):** This has been known to occur in SA since 2015/16, only in the Northern Cape and only on Date Palms. It can also cause damage on other hosts, mainly on Coco palm if not controlled. DAFF has issued official orders prohibiting removal of propagating material from affected nurseries. Eradication is not possible. The occurrence of this pest has been notified internationally via the IPP of the IPPC, and directly to the NPPO of each neighbouring country.

**Iv. *Acalitus vaccinia* (the Blueberry bud mite):** This pest was detected in SA in 2014/15. Surveys have been conducted to determine where it occurs. It occurs only in various areas in Mpumalanga. It can be a serious pest and it only affects Blueberries. It is difficult to detect as it is microscopically small, and thus not possible to see with the unaided human eye. DAFF has issued official orders to restrict movement of propagating material from affected areas. The occurrence of this pest has been notified internationally via the IPP of the IPPC, and directly to the NPPO of each neighbouring country.

**v. *Bactrocera* *dorsalis* (the Oriental Fruit fly, previously known as *Bactrocera* *invadens*, the Invader Fruit fly):** This pest was first detected in SA in 2010 via the national exotic fruit fly surveillance programme. Several eradication attempts were initially successful. However, the pest has established in the northern parts of SA as a result of regional contamination/ spread. It occurs in Limpopo, Gauteng, North West, some districts in Mpumalanga and KZN; there have been some sporadic incursions in the Eastern and Northern Cape provinces as well as in the Free State. Exotic fruit fly surveillance forms part of the DAFF strategic plan. Eradication of the Oriental Fruit fly is still attempted after incursions in areas currently free from this pest. DAFF assists with chemical control in areas where there are high fruit fly numbers such as in the Mopani and Vhembe districts of Limpopo, and strives to ensure that sufficient chemicals are available as may be necessary to enable a rapid response to detection. This is a serious pest, both in terms of production losses and international trade, so it needs to be controlled. It is officially controlled: affected areas are under official control and removal control is implemented by the NPPOZA for host material. The occurrence of this pest has been notified internationally via the IPP of the IPPC, and directly to the NPPO of each neighbouring country; updates are made from time to time as necessary, and notified to specific trading partners such as the United States of America (USA), which have requested this.

**vi. *Tuta* *absoluta* (the Tomato Leafminer):** It was detected in SA in August 2016. It is a serious pest and has spread across the whole of South Africa, also occurring in natural vegetation such as in the Kruger National Park. Its spread is being monitored by DAFF. Pro-active emergency registration of appropriate agrochemicals before the pest arrived has provided some relief. Even so, it has spread to all provinces of SA in less than a year. It affects mostly tomatoes and cannot be eradicated or officially controlled since it is already widespread. The occurrence of this pest and a recent update of its current distribution have been notified internationally via the IPP of the IPPC, and directly to the NPPO of each neighbouring country

**vii. *Spodoptera* *frugiperda* (the Fall Armyworm/ FAW)**: The FAW was first detected in SA in January 2017 and its identity officially confirmed in February 2017. It rapidly spread to all provinces, except the Western Cape. It mainly affects maize in SA. It is a serious pest and is officially controlled. Recent surveys in Western Cape have indicated that the pest does not yet occur there. There were no reports of FAW during winter in Gauteng, North West, Free State, Northern Cape or the higher-lying areas of Mpumalanga and KZN. However, it was detected in Limpopo and the lower areas of Mpumalanga, KZN and the Eastern Cape during winter. Emergency registration of agrochemicals was implemented. The occurrence of this pest has been notified internationally via the IPP of the IPPC, and directly to the NPPO of each neighbouring country.

**viii. *Eriococcus* *ironsidei*** **(the Macadamia Felted Coccid):** This pest was first detected in SA in April 2017. It affects only Macadamia trees and was detected on only one farm in Mpumalanga. Delimiting surveys were conducted. Trace-forward and -backward investigations on imported propagation material are still continuing. DAFF issued official orders to restrict the removal of propagation material. The occurrence of this pest has been notified internationally via the IPP of the IPPC, and directly to the NPPO of each neighbouring country.

The H5N8 strain of HPAI which is currently affecting the country has not been found in South Africa before. Previously, outbreaks of H5N2 HPAI occurred in ostriches, but chickens and other birds were not affected.

Several factors can contribute to the spread of Avian Influenza (AI) viruses including marketing practices (live bird markets), farming practices and the presence of the viruses in wild birds.  AI viruses can be spread through direct contact with secretions from infected birds, especially faeces or through contaminated feed, water, equipment and clothing.  Apart from being highly contagious among poultry, avian influenza viruses are readily transmitted from farm to farm by the movement of domestic live birds, people (especially when shoes and other clothing are contaminated), and contaminated vehicles, equipment, feed, and cages.

**(3)** The Department has developed an appropriate legislative and regulatory framework to control and manage the occurrence and spread of the plant pests in question in order to prevent or manage their further spread. The Department has also activated its intervention strategy, namely the Emergency Plant Pest Response Plan, as well as relevant action plans for emergency action and speedy response to these pest detections. The regulatory framework includes promulgation of specific Control Measures relating to Fall Armyworm and the Oriental Fruit Fly (*Bactrocera* *dorsalis*), in addition to issuance of official orders in specified quarantine areas, as indicated for each listed pest above.

For both HPAI and FMD, the minimum control measures such as quarantine and movement control are implemented. Movement onto, off or through affected farms are restricted and control measures are applied.

For HPAI, commercial farmers are encouraged to increase their biosecurity measures on farms, including limiting access to people who might have had contact with birds and chickens outside the farm. Keepers of chickens, geese and ducks, including backyard farmers, are encouraged to observe minimum biosecurity measures to prevent this disease in their birds, such as limiting exposure to wild birds by providing feed and water indoors or at least well underneath a low solid roof.  Care should be taken to prevent chickens drinking from common water sources where wild birds congregate.   DAFF has requested the public, as well as commercial and backyard farmers, to report any cases of large numbers of birds dying to the nearest state vets so the required follow up investigations and collection of samples can be done.