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MEDIA STATEMENT

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MINISTER STEENHUISEN CALLS FOR URGENT IMPLEMENTATION OF SOUTH AFRICA-BOTSWANA ACTION PLAN TO COMBAT FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE

The Minister of Agriculture, John Steenhuisen, has welcomed the endorsement of a comprehensive 2026-2028 Action Plan between South Africa and Botswana aimed at strengthening regional cooperation in the fight against Foot and mouth disease (FMD) while calling for the urgent implementation of coordinated cross-border interventions, including vaccination campaigns and border fence maintenance.

The Action Plan formed part of discussions held during the Sixth Session of the Bi-National Commission (BNC) between the Republic of South Africa and the Republic of Botswana, which took place in Gaborone on 21 May 2026. President Cyril Ramaphosa led the South African delegation.

“With FMD posing an ongoing regional threat to livestock production, rural livelihoods and agricultural trade, it is clear that no country can defeat this disease in isolation,” Minister Steenhuisen said.

“The old saying tells us that good fences make good neighbours, but in the face of FMD, strong and properly maintained border fences help protect the livestock industries, livelihoods and agricultural economies of both our nations. Securing our borders is not about division. It is about building a coordinated regional biosecurity system capable of managing transboundary animal disease risks effectively.”

Collaboration on the prevention and management of FMD was identified as one of the High Impact Priority Projects of the BNC. The Ministers responsible for Agriculture were directed by the President Ramaphosa and President Bonga to accelerate the implementation of the Plan of Action aimed at eradicating transboundary diseases and enhance market access for each other’s agriculture products.

The BNC welcomed the agreement by the Ministers of Agriculture to strengthen disease management cooperation by establishing a Transboundary Animal Disease (TAD) Plan covering key border regions such as Lobatse-Mahikeng and Francistown-Musina.



“This agreement marks an important step towards a far more coordinated regional response to animal disease management. Strengthening of diagnostic capacity, coordinated cross border vaccination programmes, maintenance of border fences, and joint livestock farmer exchange and training programmes will all play an important role in safeguarding our livestock industries eradication of diseases and against future outbreaks,” the minister said.

According to the law enforcement agencies of both countries, stock theft is the number one crime between the two countries. The agreement to establish the cross-border Stock Theft Management Task Force by September 2026 will mitigate the current high levels of stock theft that is negatively affecting farmers on both sides of the boarder equally. The agreement on the mutual recognition of livestock traceability systems between the two countries was applauded by the .

“Improved traceability systems are critical, not only in managing disease outbreaks, but also in tackling stock theft, improving animal movement control, strengthening food safety and facilitating regional agricultural trade,” Minister Steenhuisen said.

The minister further pointed out that the agreement by South Africa and Botswana to champion regional biosecurity cooperation within the Southern African Development Community (SADC) need to be commended. This development is welcomed as it comes ahead of the upcoming SADC Agriculture Ministerial Meeting which will be held in Zimbabwe on 29 May 2026 and chaired by Minister Steenhuisen. The development of a unified regional strategy for the control and eradication of FMD will be high on the agenda.

“One of the clearest lessons from countries in Southern America that have successfully controlled FMD is that regional coordination is essential. Diseases do not recognise borders. Southern Africa must therefore move towards a far more integrated and coordinated regional biosecurity approach and the establishment of a regional antigen bank is the ultimate goal,” he said.

IMPORT RESTRICTIONS ON AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS

The ongoing issue of restrictions on certain South African agricultural exports into Botswana also formed an important part of bilateral discussions.

Minister Steenhuisen noted South Africa’s concern regarding instances where agricultural exports have reportedly faced border restrictions without prior formal communication, despite previous understandings reached during the 2022 Bi-National Commission process.

“We believe that trade matters affecting our two countries should always be addressed through constructive engagement, transparency, mutual respect and amicable bilateral solutions. The commission’s endorses a Communication Protocol and establishment of a Bilateral Agricultural Trade Task Team by June 2026. These

are the mechanisms to enhance market access by improving communication, strengthening institutional cooperation and proactively resolving trade-related concerns before they escalate.”

“Greater coordination and transparency will provide increased certainty to producers, exporters, retailers and agricultural stakeholders on both sides of the border while strengthening the long-term agricultural relationship between our countries,” Minister Steenhuisen said.

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