

# Clarity on animal health

The long-awaited report by the World Organisation for Animal Health on the state of South Africa's government veterinary services was released recently. **Lloyd Phillips** reports.

**T**he Performance of Veterinary Services (PVS) report followed an October 2012 visit to South Africa by a five-person World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) evaluation team. The evaluation was at the request of the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF), under which the national Veterinary Services (VS) falls.

The findings and recommendations of the OIE's PVS report were extensive. It found that there was a "lack of veterinarians in regular contact with farms and animals", the technical independence of VS was being challenged by the break in command between national and provincial VS, and the country's VS coordination with the Department of Health could be improved.

"Border control and quarantine inspection are very good. However, they are not regularly audited to assess resources and procedures," the report stated.

Makenosi Maroo, DAFF's Chief Director: Stakeholder Relations and Communications, said that her department was "convinced about the accuracy of the information [in the report]".

"South Africa takes into consideration the OIE PVS evaluation findings in the development of a high-level veterinary strategy in order to improve the Veterinary Services," she said.

Mooketsa Ramasodi, DAFF's Chief Director: Inspection and Quarantine Services, said: "DAFF is engaging industry stakeholders on finalising a PVS gap analysis, while simultaneously crafting strategy options to the gaps identified."

A gap analysis is a comparison of an entity's actual performance against its potential performance.

## ‘THE PROBLEMS HIGHLIGHTED IN THE REPORT WERE EXPECTED AND ARE NO SURPRISE’

In recent years, the effectiveness of South Africa's VS has been criticised by the livestock industry, largely due to the January 2011 discovery of foot-and-mouth disease antibodies in communally farmed cattle in northern KwaZulu-Natal. It resulted in an international ban on the export of cloven-hoofed animals and their unprocessed products and cost the red meat industry about R4 billion per year in lost revenue. The ban was lifted on 14 February 2014.

"Diseases such as classical swine fever, avian influenza and Rift Valley fever also illustrate the challenges the South African Veterinary Services are experiencing. The ostrich industry suffered an outbreak of avian influenza and is facing challenges in trying to control the disease," Maroo said. Dave Ford, chairperson

of the South African Red Meat Industry Forum, said that "the majority of problems and the recommendations highlighted [in the OIE's PVS report] were expected and therefore are no surprise".

Ford added that DAFF's VS held a meeting with various livestock industry representatives on 4 June 2014 to discuss the prioritising of some of the recommendations in the PVS report.

Gerhard Schutte, CEO of the Red Meat Producers' Organisation (RPO), welcomed what he described as "the transparent way in which DAFF is dealing with the OIE [PVS] report".

"The most important issues that need attention, according to the RPO, are the chain of command between national and provincial veterinary departments, the lack of dedicated risk assessment capacity, as well as legal capacity within the department," Schutte said.

The National Wool Growers' Association (NWGA) indicated that it was "positioned to assist DAFF" with achieving the report's recommendations for improving chain of command within South Africa's VS and strengthening the VS's support to include non-commercial livestock farmers.

"Future involvement of [the livestock] industry in the development of any strategies and initiatives is essential to ensure all challenges are approached collectively with government as a whole," said Leon de Beer, general manager of the NWGA. The SA Poultry

Association (SAPA) pointed out that representatives of the OIE would be visiting South Africa again in mid-June and that "by then there should be a consolidated response available for discussion between DAFF and the OIE".

"To bring about some of the changes suggested [by the OIE's PVS report], political approval is needed," said SAPA's CEO, Kevin Lovell.

The Milk Producers' Organisation (MPO) said that the National Animal Health Forum was "making good progress and doing excellent work" on possibly having legislation amended to improve the chain of command between national and provincial VS's respectively.

"Law enforcement in terms of animal identification and the control of animal movement are of utmost importance.

"It is critical to find solutions for dealing with diseases, to ensure South Africa's export status is not negatively affected," said the MPO's managing director, Bertus de Jongh.

The South African Warmblood Horse Society (SAWHS) described the VS's reaction to previous outbreaks of diseases in the national horse population as having been "excellent". However, SAWHS was concerned at proposals to add further restrictions on certain commonly used and currently over-the-counter veterinary medicines.

• Visit [www.farmersweekly.co.za](http://www.farmersweekly.co.za) to view the full OIE PVS report.