

■ EMERGENCY

Drought-stricken Western Cape farms to receive aid

THE Western Cape Cabinet has approved the release of R50 million in emergency funding to assist farms severely affected by drought.

According to the province's MEC for finance and economic opportunities, David Maynier, the release of the funding was authorised earlier this week.

This followed a request that was initiated by the province's agricultural MEC, Ivan Meyer.

The funds will be allocated specifically to provide two months of fodder support for farmers in the drought-stricken Central Karoo District, Matzikamma and Little Karoo areas.

"This drought will be felt for years to come, especially in the rural areas where agriculture is the main generator of the Western Cape economy. The socio-economic impact on farmwork-



DAVID Maynier.

ers and farming communities would be significant should the agricultural activity in the Western Cape collapse.

"The agricultural and agri-processing sectors are vital to the Western Cape economy, contributing 36% of exports from the province in 2018. Agriculture is also the fastest growing export sector in the Western Cape with 26.9% growth last year," said Maynier.

He added that it was of vital impor-

tance that the decision to allocate funding was urgently taken to ensure the agricultural sector continued to support economic growth and job creation in the province.

Meyer thanked Maynier and the cabinet.

"We have also approached the national Department of Agriculture for an additional R147m for further drought support," said Meyer.

"While the R50m will bring immediate relief and fodder support to farmers in the worst affected parts of the province, the Western Cape department of agriculture will also make a further R100 000 available to extend its current humanitarian support by providing pastoral and psychological support to farmers and farmworkers.

"We will also continue to engage and provide advice to farmers through our agricultural extension services. Six

hundred and sixty agri workers in Kannaland, Matzikamma and other affected districts are also benefiting from our extended public works green opportunities programme," he added.

To determine the extent of the prevailing drought, a technical drought assessment was undertaken by the Department of Agriculture in February and March.

The results of the assessment revealed that the northern part of the West Coast District, the entire Central Karoo, and parts of the Eden, Cape Winelands and Overberg were still struggling with severe drought conditions and were classified as extremely critical.

In many areas, no natural vegetation has survived the drought and planted pastures and fodder banks have long been exhausted, the department said. | African News Agency (ANA)