

Farm employers say proposed wage increase too steep

Dozens of employers in the farming sector on Monday said the farmworkers' demand of a daily wage of R150 was too excessive, and it could lead to thousands of workers being laid off should the new sectoral determination decree agree with the employees.

Employers attending the Department of Labour's public hearing into wages and other conditions of employment, which was held in Ottosdal in the North West, said should the workers' wage demands be met, the livelihoods of many employees would be negatively affected due to farmers being unable to afford the increase.

The meeting came after a packed programme over the weekend, which saw departmental officials addressing meetings in Bothaville in the Free State and in Witfontein, near Ottosdal.

In those meetings, Mogodi Masenya, the departmental representative in the advocacy unit, said inputs were being gathered from employers and employees and thereafter taken to the Employment Conditions Commission (ECC), the body which advises the Labour Minister on wages and conditions of employment for a final decision.

"We therefore urge you to use this opportunity to do all in your power to influence the final outcome of the process," he said.

The minimum wage for the sector currently stands at R69 per day.

Zakes Mokgwatlhe, of the department's advocacy unit, said inputs in relation to the minimum wages should be raised in relation to the ability of employers to carry on their businesses successfully, bearing in mind the creation and retention of employment, cost of living as well as the alleviation of poverty.

The hearings will end on Thursday after sessions in Kwa-Mhlushwa in Mpumalanga, Barkley East in the Eastern Cape and in Bronkhorstpruit in Gauteng.

The farming sector in the Western Cape was recently rocked by strikes, where workers downed tools in demand of higher wages.