

## State dragging feet over drought aid in Western Cape - DA

The national Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and the Democratic Alliance-run Western Cape government are locked in a wrangle over drought aid while farmers are reeling from one of the worst dry spells on record.

By [Bekezela Phakathi](#) 12 Apr 2016



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The DA says farms in the province are in dire straits and blames this on the national government, which has dragged its feet declaring the Western Cape a disaster area in its entirety, while this status has been accorded to KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga, the Free State, Limpopo and the North West. Such status affords provinces drought relief in the form of cash and stock feed, among others.

Agri Western Cape CEO Carl Opperman has thrown his weight behind the DA and said the province had not received assistance from the national government, despite the West Coast and Central Karoo being declared drought disaster areas. The municipalities of Prince Albert, Oudtshoorn and Witzenberg had also been classified as drought disaster areas.

Agriculture is a key sector and major employer in the Western Cape. The province has asked for R88m from the national government in drought relief. Economic opportunities MEC Alan Winde announced that the province would apply for an additional R23m in drought relief.

### A disaster in the making

Beverley Schäfer, DA Western Cape spokeswoman on economic opportunities, tourism and agriculture, said: "Our farms are in a critical state thanks to a lack of support from national government. As such, farmers need consumer support to get through this crisis.

"Our wine and fruit industries are facing an R1.2bn loss this year. The fuel increases will place a further R915m bill on the sector due to the weakening rand."

Schäfer said farmers were taking strain because of the drought, minimum wage increases and soaring input costs fuelled by a weak rand. "In the face of this, it is deeply concerning that Agriculture, Forestry and

Fisheries Minister Senzeni Zokwana is reluctant to give assistance to our farmers in the Western Cape.

"This crisis is causing serious damage and stands to become a complete disaster if national government does not take it seriously. We must make every effort to save the job-creating agricultural sector and our farms," said Schäfer.

### **Application for funds with provincial disaster management centre**

Department spokeswoman Bomikazi Molapo said the Western Cape's application for more funds was with the provincial disaster management centre. "As per the Disaster Management Act of 2002, the Disaster Management Framework of 2005 and Drought Relief Framework, the province is mandated to submit a funding request - supported by the national department - to the Western Cape disaster management centre for further processing by the national disaster management centre," said Molapo.

Some funds had been made available to the province through the prioritised comprehensive agricultural support programme. Provinces were advised, and asked, to reprioritise funds and the Western Cape had availed R5.1m through its equitable share.

"Implementation in terms of assisting smallholder grain farmers and their agri-workers is ongoing in Western Cape's Central Karoo and West Coast district - as reported by the province on a weekly basis," Molapo said.

"Furthermore, additional funds are requested through the National Disaster Management Centre to National Treasury based on the anticipated shortfall for all provinces to assist the affected farmers," she said.

*Source: Business Day*