

Zambian antelope import on hold

A bid to import sable antelope from Zambia was delayed when the North Gauteng High Court ordered that a risk analysis relating to foot-and-mouth disease be done.

The sable were captured in the Kafue National Park, where three types of foot-and-mouth disease are known to be endemic.

Judge Eberhardt Bertelsmann ordered on Friday, 29 January 2010, that Dr Mpho Maja, director of the Directorate of Animal Health, not issue any permits for the importation of live sable antelope until she had given interested parties a reasonable amount of time to comment and for the risk analysis to be done.

The urgent application was brought by the Red Meat Industry Forum in response to a notice published in the Government Gazette on 21 December 2009 that laid out proposed protocol for the importation of the antelope.

The notice was published in respect of 153 sable antelope that are intended to be imported into SA by the businessman, Chris Visser, Aitjie van Wyk and Zimbabwean Eddy Kadzombe, who in 2003 was involved in a contentious attempt to bring in 160 sable antelope that were stolen from a Chinhoyi farmer. This is a matter of record in the Zimbabwe court.

The latest herd is being kept in quarantine pens in the Lusaka National Park. Sources in Zambia said the air freighting of the animals to SA was imminent.

Pens to receive the animals have been built on Visser's farm in the Kimberley area.

The December notice gave interested parties until Sunday to comment, after which the protocol was to be adopted and the animals' importation expedited.

The forum contested the proposed adoption of the protocol on the grounds that the Directorate of Animal Health had an existing import policy prohibiting the importation of cloven-hoofed animals from Zambia.

Papers presented in court said it was not the forum's intention that the existing policy could never be changed, but SA had to comply with international obligations and be able to produce an import risk analysis in terms of the Office International de Epizooties (OIE), the international organisation for animal health.

Appearing for the forum, Hilton Epstein SC said a request by one of the applicants' attorneys to the Directorate of Veterinary Services' Dr Sunelle Strydom for a copy of the risk analysis was met with the reply that the Zambian Import Risk Analysis was a confidential internal document and not a public document.

Bertelsmann ordered that an import risk analysis be conducted and that Maja publish, for final comment, his proposed policy on the Zambian sable antelope.

Source: Business Day

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