



Understanding the Declaration of Foot and Mouth Disease as a National Disaster

13 February 2026

The declaration of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) as a National Disaster marks a significant and necessary step in responding to the current outbreak and the risk it poses to South Africa's livestock sector, food security, rural livelihoods and export markets.

This declaration does not mean that the situation is out of control. Rather, it enables government to respond with greater speed, coordination and resource alignment. It provides the legal framework to mobilise additional resources, coordinate national and provincial efforts, streamline procurement of vaccines and biosecurity materials, and strengthen cooperation between agriculture, trade, policing, transport and disaster management authorities.

FMD is a highly contagious viral disease affecting cloven-hoofed animals such as cattle, sheep, goats and pigs. While it does not pose a food safety risk to humans, its economic impact is severe. Outbreaks result in movement restrictions, loss of export status, market disruptions and significant financial strain across the value chain.

What This Declaration Is - and What It Is Not

It is important to clarify that the classification of FMD as a *National Disaster* is **not the same** as the National State of Disaster declared during Covid-19 under section 27 of the Disaster Management Act.

We are **not** currently in a section 27 National State of Disaster.

This means:

- The declaration does **not** automatically introduce wide-ranging regulatory powers through Directives similar to those seen during Covid-19.
- It does **not** ipso facto impose nation-wide livestock movement bans.
- It does **not** override existing legislation governing animal disease control.
- It does **not** authorise private individuals to exercise enforcement powers outside the law.

Movement control remains regulated in terms of the **Animal Diseases Act**, including:

- Section 9 — movement control declarations issued by the Minister.
- Section 3 — appointment of “Authorised Persons”.
- Section 4 — delegation of enforcement powers to such authorised persons.

Accordingly:

- Movement restrictions must still be declared in accordance with the Animal Diseases Act.
- Farmers may not erect gates across public roads, conduct stop-and-search operations, or enforce movement controls unless properly authorised in law.
- Enforcement powers remain vested in duly appointed and authorised officials.

The National Disaster classification supports coordination and resource mobilisation, but it does not bypass the statutory framework already governing animal disease control.

Similarly, farmers, feedlots and dairies may not independently procure and administer vaccines for voluntary, pre-emptive vaccination unless and until the Minister enacts a scheme under section 10 of the Animal Diseases Act and the necessary notices are gazetted.

The declaration therefore strengthens coordination and urgency - but it does not replace or suspend existing legal requirements.

The Primary Purpose of the Declaration

The National Disaster declaration is intended to:

- Intensify and coordinate disease containment and control measures.
- Protect South Africa’s remaining disease-free areas and restore export market access.
- Mobilise additional national resources.
- Align enforcement efforts across provinces.

- Support affected producers where possible, subject to lawful processes.
- Restore confidence in the integrity of the national veterinary control system.

What Happens Immediately

Following the declaration, farmers can expect:

Targeted Movement Controls

Movement of cloven-hoofed animals in declared areas will continue to be regulated through legally issued notices under the Animal Diseases Act. Permits will be required where applicable, and compliance inspections may increase in affected zones.

Vaccination Programmes

Vaccination in infected and high-risk zones will continue under the direction of state veterinary services. Farmers will be contacted where applicable. Voluntary vaccination outside approved schemes remains subject to section 10 processes.

Enhanced Surveillance

Veterinary services will intensify inspections, tracing of animal movements, and disease surveillance. Immediate reporting of suspicious symptoms remains critical.

Strengthened Biosecurity

On-farm biosecurity must be reinforced — including visitor control, disinfection of vehicles and equipment, isolation of new or returning animals, and accurate livestock record-keeping.

Industry Engagement

Government will work with producer organisations, auction houses, abattoirs, feedlots and transporters to ensure coordinated compliance and minimise unintended economic harm.

What Is Required from Farmers

Every farmer must:

- Comply strictly with movement control notices issued under the Animal Diseases Act.
- Strengthen on-farm biosecurity immediately.
- Maintain accurate animal identification and movement records.
- Report suspected cases without delay.
- Cooperate fully with authorised veterinary and enforcement officials.

Non-compliance undermines the entire sector and risks prolonged trade restrictions and economic damage.

A Call for Responsible Leadership

This is a critical moment for South African agriculture. The livestock industry supports thousands of jobs, sustains rural communities, and contributes significantly to the national economy.

The declaration of a National Disaster signals urgency and national coordination. It does not create shortcuts outside the law, nor does it replace the Animal Diseases Act. Disease control remains grounded in lawful, science-based processes.

Through disciplined compliance, cooperative leadership and sector-wide unity, we can contain the outbreak, stabilise markets and restore South Africa's animal health status.

We call on all farmers and stakeholders to act responsibly and in full compliance with the law as we work together to safeguard the future of our livestock industry.