

MEDIA RELEASE **PSA condemns abuse of disciplinary process at Limpopo Department of Agriculture and Rural Development**

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EMBARGO None

ENQUIRIES communication@psa.co.za

The Public Servants Association (PSA) welcomes the not guilty verdict of five Union members after a lengthy disciplinary hearing process where the Limpopo Department of Agriculture and Rural Development tried to use them as scapegoats for inefficiency, potential corruption, and abuse of power in the Department.

The Department informed the Standing Committee on Public Accounts (Scopa) that these members were behind the loss of 103 cattle at Mara Research Station. This matter started in 2021 when the Department charged the former Farm Manager with eight charges of misconduct related to, amongst others, contravention of the procedure manual, gross dereliction of duties, gross dishonesty, and misrepresentation.

The Department failed dismally to prove the alleged misconduct. After failing to prove that the Farm Manager was accountable for the alleged loss of 103 cattle, the Department changed its focus to five employees who were accused to have failed to ensure that the animals were properly marked, thereby contravening section 7(1)(b) of the *Animal Identification Act, 2002* and contravention of the *Public Finance Management Act*.

The PSA represented the employees and from the outset held that the Department had abused the disciplinary process by charging these five employees on the same allegations of misconduct as the former Farm Manager. The former Farm Manager was appointed as custodian of the Department's biological asset register and was therefore accountable in terms of Public Service prescripts. The five employees had been falsely implicated, and their names slandered in the media following the Scopa hearings earlier this year. This caused them undue stress, embarrassment, and uncertainty. The Presiding Officer of the hearing found that the Department had failed to prove that the members were guilty of misconduct.

The PSA was informed by the members that although the Department reported the loss of 103 cattle to Mara Police Station, most of the cattle were found following an intensive search by employees of the Mara Research Station. The Department, however, chose to still proceed with charging these employees, pursuing a hopeless case, and disregarding their emotional wellbeing as they subjected them to undue distress.

The PSA calls on the MEC to intervene, investigate what transpired at Mara Research Station and implement consequence management for those who abused their powers by recklessly charging employees and bringing the Department into disrepute. The possibility of deliberate lying to the SA Police Service and Scopa in reporting should create discomfort for the MEC regarding the intention of such irresponsible persons.

END

