

**PRESS STATEMENT BY DR THOMAS FUNKE
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KZN floods: Canegrowers' losses standing at R222.9 million

SA Canegrowers has conducted a survey amongst canegrowers in rural areas of KwaZulu-Natal to determine the impact of the recent rains and flooding. The preliminary results, which have been provided to the national government, reveal extensive damage not only to canefields and farm infrastructure but also to access routes which allow growers to deliver their cane to mills.

By yesterday afternoon, just over 300 growers had responded to the survey and reported that 2516.65 hectares of cane had extensive crop and root damage, therefore requiring the total replanting of these fields to bring them back into production. This damage comes to an estimated R194.9 million. Farm infrastructure to the value of R27.9 million has also been destroyed bringing the total losses to R222.9 million.

A number of local roads and bridges were also washed away, which are not only the main transport nodes to mills but also the access routes for farm inputs and workers employed on these farms.

This catastrophic damage comes just as many canegrowers had started recovering from the riots and arson attacks that took place in July last year, which saw 554 000 tons of cane being burnt and R84 million in losses. It is clear that this latest tragedy could be the final death knell for hundreds of canegrowers and the rural livelihoods they support. In particular, small-scale growers are most at risk of not recovering from losses of this magnitude.

SA Canegrowers has collated all this information into a report which it sent to national government yesterday afternoon, following a request received from the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition as well as the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development. We welcome President Ramaphosa's announcement that a national state of disaster has been declared in order to ensure the mobilisation of more resources, capabilities and technical expertise to provide relief and rehabilitation to affected communities. It is vital that these plans include assistance for the

sugar industry, which provides more than one million livelihoods where they are desperately needed in rural communities.

SA Canegrowers has therefore requested urgent financial and infrastructure relief from government to all affected growers so they are able to replant their cane fields and sustain a cash flow while they rebuild their farms in order to be in production by the next harvest season. The report also included a list of local roads and bridges that need to be prioritised for repairs so workers are able to access farms and growers are able to transport cane to mills.

A table has also been compiled to assist with identifying the needs of each individual grower and broader mill regions in order to assist government to divert resources where these are needed most. This table will be continually updated, as new information is received from growers, and provided to government.

SA Canegrowers remains committed to working closely with government to ensure critical relief is provided to growers severely impacted by the recent catastrophic events. With our industry continuing to face a number of challenges including the influx of cheap imports and the health promotion levy, we need to do all we can to assist these growers to rebuild so they continue to support the workers and communities who depend on them.

The End///

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