

**Voluntary Report** – Voluntary - Public Distribution

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**Report Name:** Update on the Foot and Mouth Disease Outbreak in the KwaZulu Natal and Eastern Cape Provinces

**Country:** South Africa - Republic of

**Post:** Pretoria

**Report Category:** Livestock and Products, Pest/Disease Occurrences

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**Report Highlights:**

The foot and mouth disease (FMD) outbreak that has impacted South Africa since 2021 continues to spread in some parts of the country despite government control efforts. KwaZulu Natal province has been most heavily affected, with repeated new detections, including in late February 2025. This report summarizes the recent history of the outbreak, including the results of a January 2025 technical report on FMD from the South African Department of Agriculture.

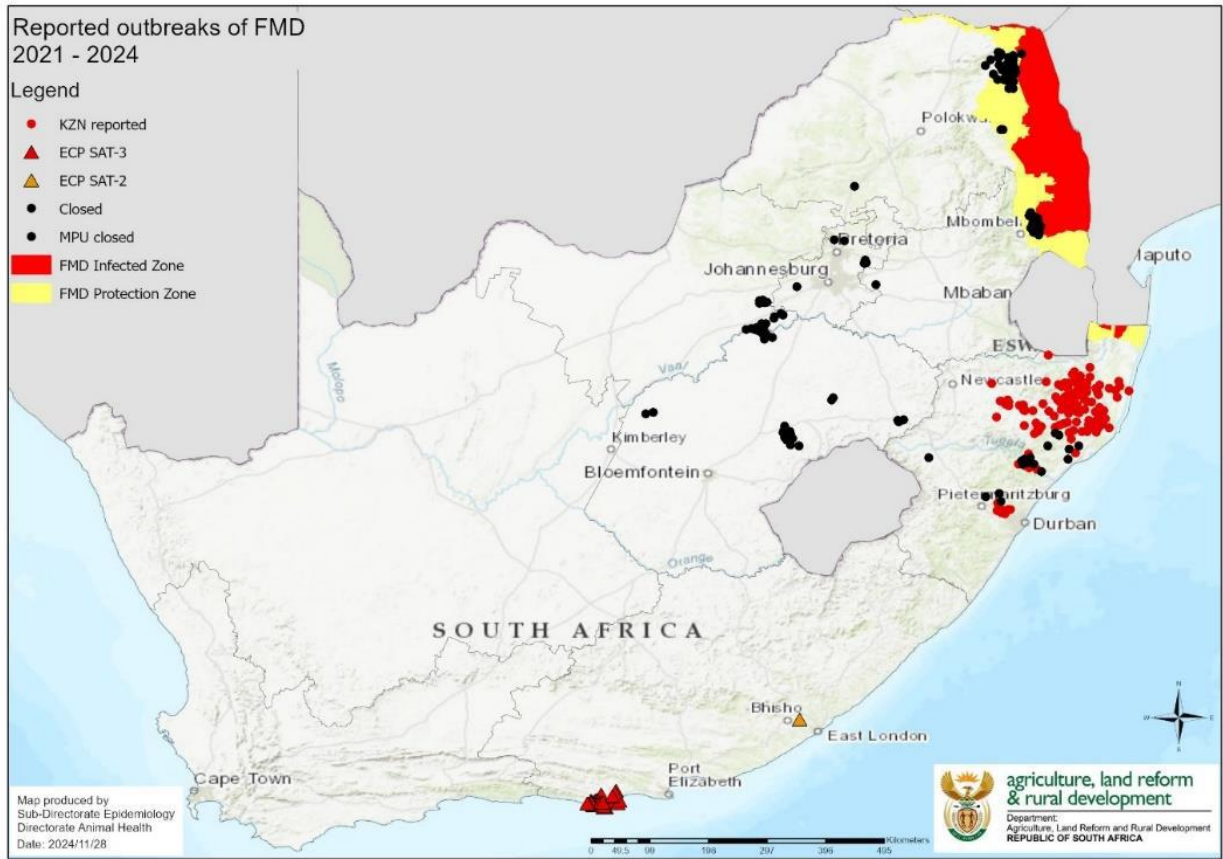
## Background

Since 2021, South Africa's KwaZulu Natal (KZN) province has battled outbreaks of foot and mouth disease (FMD). The Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD) has not been able to resolve most cases in KZN province due to challenges with transmission from wild buffalo populations, despite deploying a wide range of control measures including vaccination, depopulation, and movement restrictions. In February 2025, new cases of FMD were reported in cattle dip tanks in the Mtubatuba, Vryheid, and Newcastle areas in the KZN province. The Eastern Cape province has also faced issues with unresolved FMD cases since April 2024, but in other parts of the country DALRRD has been more successful containing and resolving isolated outbreaks.

The current series of outbreaks began when DALRRD announced FMD detections in a communal area in cattle within Mtubatuba in the UMkhanyakude District of KZN in May 2021. The impacted area was part of South Africa's previous FMD-free zone before the World Organization for Animal Health (WOAH) suspended the internationally recognized status in 2019. See GAIN Report: [Foot and Mouth Disease Outbreak in the KwaZulu-Natal Province](#).

The index case of the KZN outbreak was detected in cattle in the uMkhanyakude, Zulu Land and King Cetshwayo District Municipalities, with twenty-nine locations in the province identified as FMD positive and reported to WOAH. At the time of the outbreak, DALRRD noted that the virus responsible for the outbreak is a SAT 2 virus, also behind an outbreak that occurred in the Protection Zone in northern Limpopo Province in 2019. See GAIN Report: [Progress on the Foot and Mouth Outbreak in the Mtubatuba Area in KwaZulu Natal Province](#)

**Figure 1: FMD outbreaks since 2021**



Source:

**DALRRD FMD Technical Report**

On April 11, 2022, DALRRD announced 56 new cases of FMD involving farms and communal areas in the Free State, KZN, Limpopo, Northwest, and Gauteng provinces. See: [South Africa Attempts to Control Food and Mouth Disease Outbreaks](#)

In April 2024, in Eastern Cape province, DALRRD reported that clinical signs of FMD were observed on a farm in the Humansdorp area, and further FMD cases were detected in the East London area. A total of 39 farms were found FMD positive and were placed under quarantine with animals vaccinated under DALRRD direction. In addition, a further 36 farms were pre-emptively vaccinated and placed under quarantine. Furthermore, movement controls were implemented on all farms under quarantine. DALRRD declared a Disaster Management Area (DMA) on 26 July 2024 to prevent outward spread of the outbreaks and to decrease the viral load and infection of the area.

In the [January 2025 FMD technical report](#), DALRRD reported that the outbreaks in the Free State, Gauteng, and Limpopo provinces were all resolved. In KZN, however, only 17 of the 140 FMD outbreaks have been resolved. The seventeen outbreaks in KZN that have been resolved and notified as closed to WOAHP include two feedlots outside the main outbreak area that were depopulated through controlled

slaughter. Most open outbreaks are in communal cattle dip tanks and small-scale farms, near five affected game reserves. According to the DALRRD Animal Health Directorate, the resolution of this event is unlikely due to the FMD carrier status of the buffalo populations in these affected game reserves.

In the Eastern Cape province, only one of 38 outbreaks was resolved. DALRRD continues to survey the disaster management area to confirm that virus circulation is brought under control and controlled slaughter of cattle is continuing from farms under quarantine in the Eastern Cape outbreaks.

On February 27, 2025, DALRRD announced that a new outbreak of the FMD virus was confirmed in a dip tank in Mtubatuba district of KZN province. In the announcement, DALRRD reported that the infected cattle showed clinical signs of FMD in December 2024, prompting sample collection, and laboratory results confirmed the introduction of a SAT1 FMD virus into the area. Given that a SAT2 FMD event has been ongoing in the region since 2021, further investigations were conducted, confirming that the detected SAT1 virus is similar to one recently identified in the northern part of Kruger National Park.

Furthermore, clinical signs of FMD have also been observed in districts around Vryheid and Newcastle in KZN province over the past three weeks. Laboratory tests have confirmed the presence of the FMD virus, with virus typing still in progress to determine whether these outbreaks were caused by a SAT1 or SAT2 strain.

Control measures within the Disease Management Area (DMA) in KZN province remain unchanged. The affected cattle dip tanks remain under quarantine, and vaccination efforts in the area continue. The vaccine being used covers all three FMD SAT strains. Dip tanks in newly affected areas have also been placed under quarantine.

### **Impact of the FMD outbreak on beef production and cattle numbers**

The South African beef industry is characterized by a well-developed commercial sector and an informal sector consisting of many communal subsistence farmers and a growing number of emerging farmers. About 60 percent of the estimated 13 million head of cattle in South Africa are owned by commercial farmers, while emerging and communal farmers account for the remaining 40 percent. See: [South African Beef Imports Expected to Remain Flat in 2018](#). Communal and emerging farmers have fewer resources and are mostly untrained in the control of diseases, making it more difficult for them to mitigate biosecurity risks during outbreaks.

According to DALRRD, South Africa had a total of 12.2 million cattle in May 2024. The Eastern Cape province has the largest cattle population with a 25 percent share, followed by KwaZulu Natal with 19 percent. Although the current FMD outbreak and movement controls implemented in the two provinces may negatively affect beef production, these losses will be supplemented by imports of

weaner cattle from Botswana and Namibia for the feedlots. South Africa imported 717,027 cattle in 2024, with 81 percent of the imports coming from Namibia.

### **Trade Impacts**

Despite the continuous outbreaks, the impact on South Africa's live cattle exports has been minimal, with the vast majority of live cattle exports going to neighboring Botswana and Namibia. Likewise, South Africa's beef and beef product exports have mostly continued uninterrupted, with exports rising 27% in 2024 to 48 thousand tons. Exports have continued due to agreements on safe commodities that DALRRD negotiated with trading partners after the loss of WOAHP recognized FMD-free status in January 2019. Most trading partners have retained the negotiated agreements for these commodities, based on the guarantees provided by South Africa for processing to ensure inactivation of the FMD virus. South Africa's primary beef and beef product export markets are in the Middle East and neighboring countries, along with China. See: [South Africa Attempts to Control Food and Mouth Disease Outbreaks](#)

### **Attachments:**

No Attachments.