

Foot and Mouth Disease: Vhembe Outbreak and Surveillance Update

15 February 2019

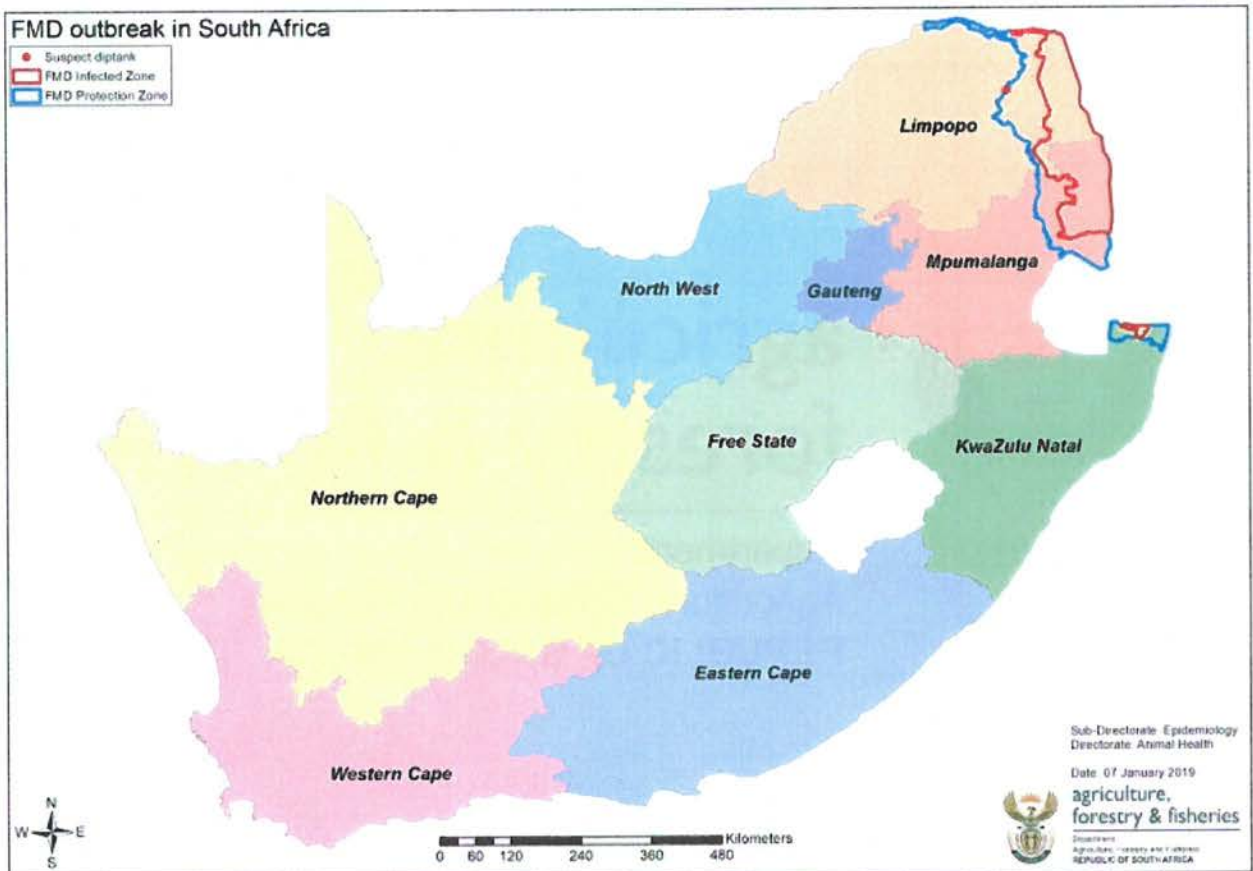


Report compiled by:
Directorate: Animal Health

1. Introduction and summary

On 7 January 2019, an outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) was confirmed in cattle in the Vhembe district of Limpopo Province. The outbreak occurred in the high surveillance area of the FMD Free Zone, immediately adjacent to the protection zone. The outbreak was reported to the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and, as a result, South Africa lost its FMD free zone without vaccination status.

Map 1: Location of the FMD outbreak in the FMD free zone of South Africa



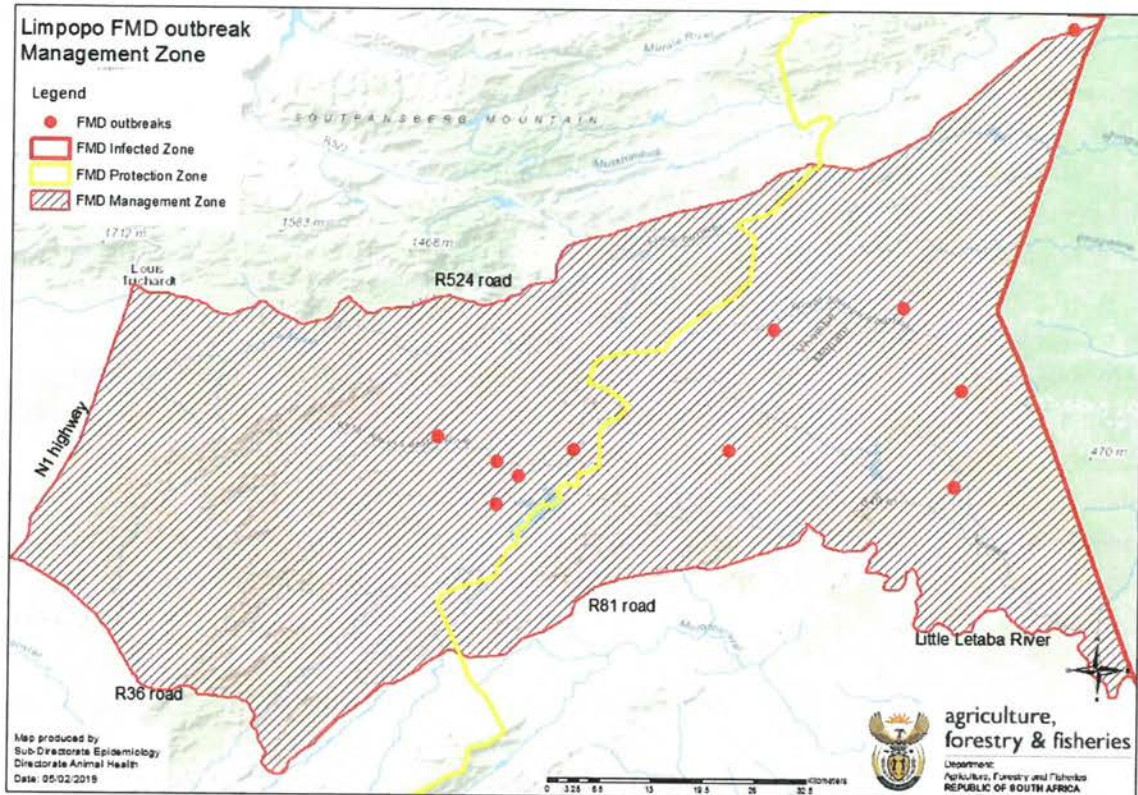
2. Outbreaks reported

Up to 15 February 2019, 5 positive locations have been confirmed by the Transboundary Animal Disease programme of Onderstepoort Veterinary Research and reported to the OIE. These locations are all in close proximity within the Disease Management area that was declared in Limpopo Province. The affected animals are cattle kept in rural villages with communal diptanks and grazing.

3. Control measures implemented

A Disease Management area was declared and the details published in the Government gazette. This area is enclosed by the R81 Road, the R36 Road, N1 and the R524 Road.

Map 2: Area defined as the FMD outbreak Management Area



A Joint Operations Committee (JOC) was established and meets on a daily basis, consisting of Traffic, Departmental and District Disaster Management, Police, Industry (the National Animal Health Forum, Feedlot association) and Provincial and DAFF veterinary officials. The JOC has facilitated the placement of 16 road blocks at strategic points.

A Veterinary Operations Committee (VOC), which meets daily, was also established to handle control measures implemented in the Disease Management area. The VOC has three main activities – inspections/surveillance, vaccination and movement control. Culling of affected or in-contact animals in the area is at the moment not advocated.

3.1 Inspections / surveillance in Disease Management Area:

Clinical and serological surveillance are conducted in all epidemiological groups in the Disease Management Area. Cattle, small stock and pigs have been inspected on over 297 inspection visits, for clinical signs of FMD; this number of inspections includes repeat visits to locations in the Disease Management Area, as per the surveillance strategy. Inspections are conducted by different teams, with 2 teams allocated to deal with known positive locations, 7 teams doing inspections in the areas around infected locations, 8 teams working in the rest of the Mopani district and 3 clean teams working from the outside in the rest of the Disease Management area.

Local livestock owners were urged to report any suspicion of clinical cases to the veterinary or extension officials in the area. All potential FMD cases reported to the Veterinary Authorities are investigated and animals are inspected for clinical signs of FMD. Where suspicious clinical signs are found, samples are collected and sent to the laboratory for confirmation. Seven points where suspect clinical signs were reported by the public – both inside and outside the Disease Management Area - were inspected and found to be negative for FMD.

3.2 Vaccination:

Vaccination of cattle commenced on 14 January 2019, starting with cattle in the affected villages, as well as cattle in the 20km radius around the affected villages. Almost 22 000 animals in 58 villages / dip tanks have been vaccinated so far, of which about 12 000 are in the part of the Disease Management area that was previously free zone. The rest of the vaccinated animals are in the FMD protection zone. Vaccinated cattle are marked to identify them as vaccinated.

3.3 Movement control:

There is a complete standstill of cloven hoofed animals in the FMD Management area and this standstill is still in force. No cloven hoofed animals are allowed to move within, into, through or out of the declared FMD Management area. Products from cloven hoofed animals are allowed to move within the Management area, but movements out of the area are considered on merit and only allowed with permits issued by the local state veterinarian and in compliance with the conditions of such permits. Products processed using methods validated to inactivate the FMD virus are safe to be moved out of the area.

Since there is no sign that the disease has spread beyond the declared Disease Management Area, the caution of movement of cloven hoofed animals (including wildlife) and unprocessed products out of Mopani District and Vhembe District as well as the Molemole Municipality of Capricorn District, can now be relaxed.

4. Epidemiological investigation and surveillance

The virus was identified as SAT2. This outbreak is regarded as a continuation of the outbreaks in the FMD protection zone which were reported in Vhembe and Giyani in May and August 2018. This SAT2 virus strain is closely related to the virus found in carrier buffalo in the Kruger National Park in the adjacent FMD infected zone. It is therefore most likely that the origin of the original outbreak in 2018 was due to contact between stray buffalo, escaping from the FMD infected zone and coming into contact with adjacent communal cattle. A joint effort by DAFF and SANParks is underway to identify and repair breaks in the Kruger National Park fence adjacent to Limpopo.

Letters were sent to the Provincial Veterinary Services and private veterinarians to request their support in increasing passive surveillance for FMD in the suspended FMD free zone. Veterinarians are urged to follow-up and investigate any suspect FMD signs and to report their findings to the local state veterinarian as well as the National Directorate Animal Health.

5. Trade implications

As a result of this outbreak, South Africa lost its OIE recognised FMD free zone without vaccination status and exports where FMD free zone attestation is required could not be certified. This has had a devastating effect on trade of cloven hoofed animals and their products from South Africa. Trade partners have been notified of the outbreak and guarantees provided for products which do not pose a risk of transmitting the disease, such as heat treated meat and dairy products, deboned and matured beef, scoured wool, salted hides and skins, and livestock embryos. Trade partners are also requested to consider importation of pork products from known FMD free pig compartments. Trade restrictions on the export of processed products and pork from FMD free pig compartments have been relaxed by many trade partners and, where required, negotiation of new health certificates is underway.

6. Awareness and extension

Press releases were issued to inform the public and the industry of the outbreak, the clinical signs of FMD, the control measures implemented and the effects on trade. Farmers in the whole country are cautioned to observe bio-security measures – not to allow any new animals into their herds, and to minimize the movement of their own herds to other farms.

During a meeting between the industries – represented by the National Animal Health Forum – and the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, the decision was made to establish joint task teams to streamline the work required in terms of the control of the outbreak, the promotion of continued trade in safe commodities and the ongoing communication with all stake holders.

A meeting in Makhado was attended by over 150 stakeholders, representing the RPO, NERPO, Wool-growers, Milk Producers, Auctioneers, Wildlife farmers and veterinarians. The media was also present. This meeting was organised by the RPO and was a good platform for DAFF and the National Animal Health Forum to clarify identified misconceptions about the outbreak. The meeting was well received and, following the discussions, there was good support from industry on the disease control measurements implemented.

DAFF and the Limpopo Agriculture Department are cooperating on developing awareness material to be distributed in the Disease Management Area and the adjacent districts, as well as to increase liaison with the local communities affected by the outbreak



Director Animal Health

Date: 2019-02-18

