

R300 million damage caused by black fly in the Northern Cape

Studies by Agri Northern Cape indicate that damage amounting to R300 million has been caused by black fly in the lower Orange River system in the province. This was according to HOFFIE Joubert of Agri Northern Cape's Water Affairs committee.

Joubert, who farms in the region, said it was estimated that the flies caused damage of at least R180 million to the sheep farming industry between Prieska and Upington from 2007 to 2016.

If loss of income due to the infestation's effect on tourism and human health problems were included, the damage increased to at least R300 million.

The problem is exacerbated by the fact that the flies had developed resistance to the chemicals used to combat them. The only remedy left was an organic product that had been used for the past few years,

according to Joubert. He said it was time the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) conducted tests to ascertain if the resistance to the chemical product still existed.

"These insects attack livestock, and sheep, in particular," said Joubert.

"The female black fly survives on blood and targets the softer, more exposed parts of sheep around their eyes, genitalia and ears. This results in sheep flocking together in a tight formation to escape the insect bites, often trampling the lambs to death.

"Mating is also adversely affected with an obvious impact on production."

Joubert said that the extremely low level of the Orange River and poor water condition caused by pollution and high nitrate levels had added markedly to the black fly problem.

"The insects flourish in the current conditions. Our water use has been cut by 15% by the Department of Water Affairs," he said.

Three of the five black fly species in South Africa occurred in the lower Orange River area, as well as the Free State, the Western Cape and the Eastern Cape.

Depending on the direction of the wind, the insects were nowadays found as far afield as Kenhardt and Brandvlei, as well as Askham and even Karasburg in Namibia, said Joubert.

The flies also attacked humans. This caused problems for farmworkers, particularly during the summer months when the vineyards in the lower Orange region were harvested.

Some people developed serious allergic reactions to the bites. – *Annelie Coleman*