South Africa - KZN floods put strain on farmers

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Calamitous rains lashed the province on Saturday night, causing widespread disaster and loss of lives.

The extreme thunderstorms coupled with lightning resulted in farmworkers in Newsstand, Woodford, and Langkloof being struck by lightning.

While mop-up operations are currently underway, predictions of more inclement weather point to more loss and destruction.

KZN Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs MEC Bongiwe Sithole-Moloi said with more rains expected in different parts of the province, disaster teams would remain on high alert.

“We strongly advise communities to be in safe areas during rains and not to attempt crossing flooded bridges, streams or rivers.”

Bearing the brunt of the storm were the Ugu, KwaDukuza, eThekwini and Ndwedwe municipalities, with the death toll rising to eight. The affected areas are grappling with the aftermath of the severe weather, which has caused significant destruction.

While a full picture of the losses to the agriculture sector has not been established, MEC for Agriculture Super Zuma said thus far the department estimated damage to land and infrastructure to amount to approximately R500 000.

He said the preliminary estimate was subject to change as further assessments and reports were needed to fully comprehend the impact of the floods in certain parts of the province.

According to the department, the Uthukela and Umgungundlovu districts were badly affected, with farmers having to endure crop and livestock losses, and the deaths of farmworkers.

Zuma said 26 casual farmworkers at Newsstand, Woodford and Langkloof were struck by lightning.

He said while most of them sustained minor to serious injuries and were treated at Emmaus Provincial Hospital, a 19-year-old man and a 40-year-old woman were killed.

Zuma emphasised that although rain was generally welcomed, the resulting damage posed a setback for the agriculture sector. Authorities and communities are working together to assess and respond to the impact of the storm, providing assistance to those affected and initiating recovery efforts, he said.

Commenting on the flooding and recent heavy rains, the KZN African Farmers’ Association of South Africa said the extensive rainfall also diluted essential nutrients in the soil, and it also had a negative effect on livestock and resulted in fears over food security.