

Govt support for poultry industry must translate into policy and action - FairPlay

Last week's [statement of government support](#) for the South African poultry industry does not end the industry crisis caused by dumped imports, says FairPlay. But it could mark the start of a new era of co-operation between Government and the industry to address that crisis.



This public support has been a long time coming, states FairPlay, a not-for-profit movement that opposes dumping and predatory trade practices. It follows years of apparent indifference and criticism from FairPlay and others that the government is not doing nearly enough to halt the industry decline and help it to regenerate production and jobs.

"Critics may say that the statement constitutes electioneering, considering the timing," said FairPlay founder Francois Baird. "But Government and the DTI, which issued the commitment to supporting the industry, know they will be judged on actions not words. We are looking forward to the implementation of real measures that deliver real outcomes."

That is for the future. For now, FairPlay says the government commitment to ensuring a future for the beleaguered poultry industry is clear and comprehensive, and should produce welcome results. Government and the industry have not always seen eye to eye, and the statement envisages a co-operative approach, through the industry task team and a poultry industry master plan, that holds great promise.

Departmental support

The task now, for both government and the poultry industry, will be to turn the generalities of the statement – including trade measures, export support and measures to promote growth and transformation – into policy and action specifics.

"High on that list must be support from other government departments, including Agriculture, Health and the Treasury. The Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries is responsible for the health and food safety checks on foreign production plants and import consignments. It is sorely underfunded and cannot match the level of inspection and protection that other countries provide. That money must be found, and Treasury will have to provide it," says the trade movement.

"The Department of Health allows the import of frozen bulk packs, which should be banned. Thawing and repacking chicken portions for local distribution introduces avoidable health risks. Local chicken packs carry labels ensuring traceability in the event of contamination – it is scandalous that imported chicken can be labelled vaguely as coming from a number of countries."

Halting surge of imports

However, the highest priority must go to stopping the ever-increasing surge of chicken imports, FairPlay notes in a statement. "While that continues, the industry will remain in crisis. The DTI reference in its statement to an 82% tariff on imported whole chicken is misleading – whole chicken is a tiny fraction of chicken imports. What the industry has applied for is an 82% tariff on frozen chicken portions – as the government knows full well, these are the bulk imports that rise every year and which are causing cutbacks and job losses."

FairPlay states that firm and immediate action against dumped and subsidised imports has to be an essential component of any package for growth, transformation and job creation.

"This is possible, given the tone and content of the government statement of support. Whether it will happen will depend on the depth of commitment from a number of departments before and after the coming election," FairPlay concludes.

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