

LAND

R24,5 million land price hike legit – Mpumalanga government

Despite having paid R24,51 million more for a 414ha piece of land than the close corporation it bought it from had paid shortly before, the Mpumalanga Department of Human Settlements (MDHS) said the deal was totally in line with the Public Finance Management Act.

The MDHS said it had consulted with two independent land valuers before settling on the R36,48 million price for the piece of Rietspruit Farm that Bongiveli CC had bought from Fremax Farms for R11,97 million.

In a written response to *Farmer's Weekly*, MDHS spokesperson Freddy Ngobe said that the land was bought for the Msukaligwa Municipality to establish a low-cost housing development.

Ngobe said there had been some developments made on the land after it was bought by Bongiveli CC, listed on the internet as a furniture company in Barberton, but didn't specify what these were.

"The land was bought after the municipality had indicated its importance and requested the department to do so in a letter dated 29 October 2010," Ngobe said.

"Bongiveli CC owned the land and the company does exist in the department's database."

The MDHS did not clarify what type of registered service provider Bongiveli CC is to the department, or how it arranged the



PERSPECTIVE

PHOTO:
ENGELA
AMBROSE

land purchase deal with the close corporation.

The DA's Mpumalanga branch has asked the Office of the Public Protector (OPP) to investigate the legalities of the sale. Momelezi Kula, the OPP's executive manager: outreach, education and communication, said a request had been registered and that the public protector, Advocate Thuli Madonsela, will consider it.

"It will go through the normal process of assessment and assigned to an investigator if she decides to investigate," he explained.

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In response, the MDHS said it would await any enquiries arising from the request. From the Msukaligwa Municipality, Mandla Zwane of the Office of the Executive Mayor said, "We are noting the request made to the OPP and the content thereof by the DA. However let us allow the process to unfold unhindered or without prejudice." – *Lloyd Phillips*

A FIRST IN 200 YEARS

The first buffalo calf in about 200 years has been born on the Agulhas Plain in the Overberg.

Before the Nuwejaars Wetland special management area (SMA) venture reintroduced a herd of buffalo into the area, the animals were last seen on the Agulhas Plain in the Overberg in the late 1700s.

This is the first calf the herd has produced, and according to Dirk Human, chairperson of the Nuwejaars Wetland SMA, it's the first step in turning back the clock.

"Aside from buffalo, we've also reintroduced hippo, last seen here some 150 years ago. We're slowly moving towards bringing back the natural systems as they existed in previous centuries," he explained.

The female calf will be given an appropriate indigenous Khoisan name still to be decided.

The Nuwejaars Wetland special management area includes 25 landowners in the Overberg district who are collectively managing their land for conservation, while promoting sustainable

agriculture. Members have had title deed restrictions signed against their properties to ensure conservation principles are followed. The SMA has applied for Protected Environment (PE) status, which would make it the nation's first such area.

The area the venture encompasses is home to over 100 endangered fynbos species, many of them listed as critically endangered, as well as threatened Renosterveld and irreplaceable wetlands.

The Western Cape agriculture department recently recognised the Nuwejaars Wetland SMA's contribution to conservation on agricultural land. At Agri Mega Week this month, members of the SMA signed a memorandum of co-operation with the provincial minister of agriculture, Gerrit van Rensburg.

The SMA and the department will work together closely to promote sustainable biodiversity conservation and rural development in the area. – *Staff reporter*