Background

South Africa runs a provincialised (federal) system in terms of The Constitution, with the central competent authority (Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries - DAFF) formulating policies and disease control strategies and the provinces implementing.

Border control is managed by the Border Control Operational Coordinating Committee constituted by a number of Departments, such as DAFF, South African Revenue Services, Health, Home Affairs, Public Works, Intelligence, Transport and Police and the border line protected by the Defense Force.

Prior to 1994 South Africa was not trading due to economic sanctions posed by the world. However, trade has been increasing rapidly since then, necessitating constant monitoring of our trade partners’ zoo-sanitary status, our borders, as well as passive and active national surveillance to prevent introduction and for early detection and containment.

Since the opening of markets, there has been a slight improvement of both the personnel and the structure of veterinary services, thus most of the work is done by one unit.

Internal Risk communication

With the above said, our internal risk communication is complicated by fragmentation, but is fairly well managed through structured engagements.

Assessment of risk is an ongoing process done by the state veterinarians, both at Central Competent Authority (National) level as well as Provincial Competent Authority (provincial) level. These are technically skilled officials who assess any change in the epidemiology of the disease, for endemic diseases, and conduct import risk analysis for the importation of animals and products and have access to research documents for review. Constant engagement takes place between risk assessors (State Vets) and risk managers at the Provincial and National level.

This presentation does not focus only on the import risk assessment, but general risk assessment even that which is posed by endemic diseases, diseases for which zoning and regionalization is practiced and for outbreaks of diseases which are not necessarily related to imports, such as Avian Influenza.

The communication 'strategy'

Depending on the risk, its source and the consequence, the following communication normally takes place:
Internal:

- Emergency: any disease that the OIE requires immediate notification, such as the escape of Foot and Mouth Disease from the FMD Control area into the free zone; confirmation of highly pathogenic influenza; introduction of a foreign disease. Depending on the impact to industry, political principals have to be notified before the report goes to the OIE, meaning within hours.

- Urgent: any endemic disease showing irregular pattern.

In the case of risk identified emanating from outside the borders of the country, the ports of entry are notified immediately and given the mitigation measures they should implement.

In the case of an internal risk, provincial veterinary authorities are informed and depending on the urgency, the local State Vet is contacted directly in order to effect the controls speedily.

**How does this work practically?**

Notification is received from source, such as:

- OIE emergency notification of an outbreak in a trade partner's territory: in this case, depending on commodities affected and traded with, imports are immediately suspended and ports of entry notified.

- Local laboratory on suspect or confirmed threat: responsible Provincial authorities are notified. Control measures discussed and communicated to all concerned, including affected industry. If a trade sensitive disease is reported, trade partners are notified over and above notifying the OIE. Over and above this, industries are informed to suspend exports while re-negotiations are conducted with trade partners.

- Verbal notification by local producer: first epidemiological investigation should be sought and laboratory confirmation expedited.

**Challenges**

Challenges faced is with regards to different interests on the impact of measures to manage the risk, with the burden expected to be carried by Government, by industry, while on the ground officials feel a sense of loyalty to the animal owners and thus cannot be seen to implement harsh measures.