

01 June 2023 – Wildlife Ranching South Africa (WRSA) welcomed the opportunity to engage in frank and open discussions with Mr Ramasodi, the Director-General of The Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD), members of the Department and other industry role players, including Saai, TLU SA, Neasa, consumer organizations, and the LWO) regarding the Departments Agriculture and Agro-processing Master Plan (AAMP).

WRSA Chairman, Gerhard Heyneke, highlighted some of the key issues that wildlife ranching faces as a sector within the Agro Sustainable Biodiversity Wildlife Economy. Mr Heyneke emphasized that wildlife ranching is a globally unique industry that can be used for the benefit of all, if leveraged correctly. He stressed the need to be proactive and position South Africa strategically which will in turn foster opportunities to create real jobs and allow for meaningful transformation that are sustainable over the long term.

WRSA CEO Richard York added that as wildlife ranchers we are tired of being the orphan child of both DALRRD and the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and Environment (DFFE). Our exclusion from the AAMP, despite our considerable contribution of an estimated 21 million hectares (17.2% of South Africa's land mass) with a projected 9 000 privately owned game ranches and approximately 7 000 mixed game farms is concerning. As a sector wildlife ranching did not dismantle protected areas into game ranches but rather transformed marginal agricultural land into competitive and profitable enterprises through the sustainable use of our unique natural resource: wildlife.

Wildlife ranchers receive no support during droughts or famine from DALRRD and are penalized with grossly inflated municipal rates that deter investment. On the other hand, despite conserving 80% of the estimated 20 million head of game in the country the DFFE refuses to count our wildlife when making key policy or regulatory decisions.

During the open discussion, the department alluded to a recent study which showed that through the support of 10% of redistributed land and communal areas, we have the opportunity to contribute R59bn to the gross domestic product of the country. As the Agro Sustainable Biodiversity Wildlife Economy Sector we are willing to assist in mentorship and transforming these areas into successful enterprises. But for us to do so we need to be recognized in the AAMP and we need to be recognized as a sustainable agricultural sector.

WRSA proudly represents the game ranchers that have rewilded habitat for the benefit of species conservation. To ensure that these areas are retained, we need an enabling environment that acknowledges the immense contributions that wildlife ranching plays in job creation, food security and rural economic development. WRSA is optimistic about the opportunities unlocked during the meeting and looks forward to further engagements with the department.