

Portfolio committee gets briefed on Preservation and Development of Agricultural Land Bill

The Portfolio Committee on Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development was briefed by DALRRD on the abovementioned Bill on 17 February 2023. This legislation is long overdue. There have been attempts since the early 2000's to come up with legislation that protects high value agricultural land. The two existing pieces of legislation, namely the Subdivision of Agricultural Land of 1970 and the Conservation of Agricultural Land of 1983, do not sufficiently cater for the protection of high value agricultural land.

The aims of the Bill are to prevent the fragmentation of agricultural land, to minimize the loss of agricultural land, to promote viable farming units, to encourage the optimal use of agricultural land and to provide for food security.

The Bill is based on six principles, which are:

- The principle of agro-ecosystem management,
- The principle of productivity,
- The principle of stability,
- The principle of resiliency,
- The principle of equitability,

The Bill will apply to all agricultural land in the country, also state land, which is not the case with the current legislation.

The Bill authorizes the Minister to establish evaluation and classification systems to appraise agricultural land and to spatially delineate agricultural areas. It also sets the national criteria and guidelines for compiling and preparing provincial agricultural sector plans. The Bill provides for the declaration of national and provincial protected agricultural areas by both the Minister and the MEC. Certain activities will be listed, which not commence without an agro-ecosystem authorization.

The portfolio committee is likely to call for submissions on the Bill soon.

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