

20 February 2021

## REPORT ON UMFOLOZI FLATS FLOODS DAMAGE ASSESSMENT

### 1. Introduction

Recent heavy rains experienced during the week of Eloise storm which started on 24<sup>th</sup> January and the subsequent storm of the 7<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> February have left farmers in the Umfolozi area severely affected by floods. Agricultural fields, particularly sugar cane have been flooded, with some vast hectares of cane covered in water. On Friday 19th February 2021, the South African Farmers Development Association (SAFDA) arranged a visit to the area with representatives of Umkhanyakude District Office of Agriculture in KwaZulu Natal, Umfolozi Commercial Sugar Planters (UCOSP), small scale and land reform farmers. This report provides the detail of the effects as witnessed during site visit as well as some recommended interventions to minimize the negative impact on the sustainability of farming activities in the area.

### 2. Background to the floods problem in Umfolozi Flats

Umfolozi Flats is a historically known waterlogged area, which is part of Isimangaliso Wetland. Farmers of all scales have been farming in the area despite this known historical fact. In the past years, the effects of waterlogging experienced has been mild to medium, but many times with significant loss of business. While the problem persisted, farmers have been operating on the hope that the long ongoing engagements between farmers and authorities of Isimangaliso Wetland will soon be concluded with agreement of implementing the proposed solutions to the problem of waterlogging in the area.

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*Msunduzi River Blockage. Source UCOSP*

According to information provided to SAFDA by UCOSP on the day of the visit, the problem of waterlogging is caused by two factors. The first being the condition of the Umsunduzi River which runs through the fields and is supposed to be taking the water through to where it meets with Umfolozi River to the river mouth to the sea in St Lucia. The river has bottlenecks towards the end which are too narrow to allow flow of water. The second factor is the condition of a part of the river which is supposed to serve as river mouth. The mouth cannot perform its function of taking water into the sea and it needs to be opened up using excavators. The flooding is believed to be a back flood caused by water returning from the river mouth area due to inability flow through to the sea. According to UCOSP what is being experienced today is the effect of back flooding that has started building up since 2016, when the water stopped flowing through the river mouth.

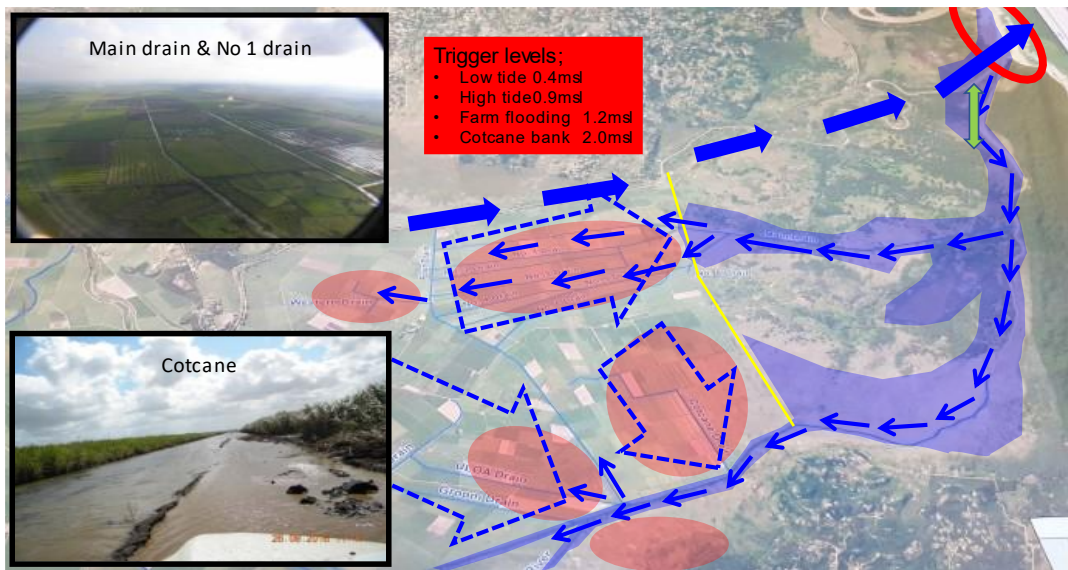
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Umfolozi Farmland back flooding. Source UCOSP



Umsunduzi River blockage. Source UCOSP

### 3. Engagement between farmers and Isimanagaliso Wetland

UCOSP reported that a task team has been set comprising of Commercial Farmers, small scale and land reform farmers and is currently engaging with Isimangaliso Wetland to try and get permission to excavate Umsunduzi River bottlenecks so as to allow water to flow through to the sea.

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The matter is considered to be a sensitive one as it evokes some serious environmental implications. The task team is hopeful that with the new management of Isimangaliso, there is positive movement in the discussions and that it looks like some of an agreement may be reach soon.

#### 4. The damage to farms

While the Umfolozi flats waterlogging is has been known for many years, what was observed with the recent floods reached levels which had never been seen before. Water is reported to have reached between 4 and 6 metres high. Crop was covered in water. Infield roads have turned to dams. During the visit one local community member was seen fishing on the infield road and indeed catching fishes. Cane extraction cannot happen as roads and bridges have been destroyed. The affected area is estimated at over 2720ha. This involves 2000ha for large scale commercial farmers and 720ha for small scale farmers, mainly in the Sokhulu area. With the rains still reported on the weather forecast for the Matuba area, it is expected that the devastation is likely worsen.



*Cane drowning in floods. Source UCOSP*

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In a particular case of one farmer Mr Joseph Mbuyazi of Big Cedar Farm, he lost his long standing wooden made bridge, which is has served him for years on extracting cane out of the field. As a result of this Mr Mbuyazi of Big Cedar Farm cannot extract his cane worth 8000 tons on crushing at the mill. This is attributed to loss of millions of rands in monetary terms. As the Umfolozi Sugar Mill is set to start crushing in March, Mbuyazi and his farm employees are set to lose income.

While the more accurate investigation and report on the numbers if still being concluded by the task team, the following table shows the extent to which small scale and land reform farmers were affected.



*Mr Joseph Mbuyazi's farm Big Cedar damage bridge, giving access to current harvest of 8000 tons of cane.*

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Farm	Affected Area (ha)
Big Sedar	171,8ha
Mabhodla	102.4ha
Fini farm	5ha
Maphumulo	150ha
MTE	10ha
Nsombosi	7ha
Nkosiyethu	115ha
Sthuli	70ha
Sokhulu (SSGs)	600ha
Monzi (SSGs)	120ha
<b>Total</b>	<b>1351.2ha</b>

*Affected fields for Small Scale and Land Reform Farmers.*

Except for Sokhulu SSGs and Monzi SSGs, all land reform farmers affected are PLAS farms.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The visit confirmed the severity and of the damage on the farms. All farmers, black and white, small, medium and large were equally affected. With rains still expected to continue the damage is likely to increase. SAFDA recommends that the following mitigating interventions be done as a matter of urgency:

- An urgent visit to the area by the senior leadership of the relevant Departments be done. These Departments should ideally include the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Agriculture, Department of Water Affairs and Sanitation, Isimangaliso Wetland, UCOSP, Representatives of small scale, larges scale and Land Reform Farmers in the area.
- While the floods affected all farmers, SAFDA has particular concern for black small scale and land reform farmers. Due to their limiting scale of farming, they often do not have options of bank overdrafts, loans or cash reserves to fall onto in times of shock or disasters. All that was destroyed is all that they have. Without any form of financial assistance, they can't return to business and they are

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literally out of income. SAFDA recommends that black small scale and land reform farmers be assisted with cash in the form of a grant to mitigate the impact of the total loss which they experienced. This will assist them to have income which they were expecting upon harvesting;

- Where replant is needed, black small scale and land reform farmers be financially assisted to replant the lost fields once the water has subsided;
- Infrastructure destroyed by the floods be rebuilt urgently to allow farmers like Mr Mbuyazi to extract cane that is due for harvesting when the mill opens;
- The long standing discussions seeking to have the water channels excavated for improved flow of water to the sea between the affected farmers' task team and Isimangaliso Wetland be accelerated to arrive at a mutually benefitting decision as soon as possible.

In the event that the Department or any stakeholder would like to collaborate with SAFDA in assisting the affected farmers, the organisation's **Head of Grower Affairs, Mr Sfiso Mnguni** can be contacted on office: **031 508 7283** or mobile: **061 102 8500** or email: [smnguni@sa-fda.org.za](mailto:smnguni@sa-fda.org.za)

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