NEWSLETTER SEPTEMBER

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- FMD in Namibia – what farmers need to know.
- Owl ears: Hearing in the dark
- How to protect oryx horns during transport…

Dear clients,
We hope you are well. A few days ago the troubling news reached us that FMD has been found in our free-zone. We therefore start with some important information on the current situation. Furthermore in this newsletter, we take a closer look at owl ears, how can they locate and catch prey in the dark, often without being able to see it? Next, a quick laugh! After sharing a video of oryx being fitted with protective pipes over their horns before transport, we received some creative suggestions about what else could be used! We had to share! Kind regards, the Wildlife Vets Namibia

FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE IN NAMIBIA – WHAT FARMERS NEED TO KNOW

The recent confirmation of Foot-and-Mouth Disease (FMD) in Namibia has understandably caused great concern among farmers, game farmers and everyone involved in the livestock and wildlife industries. The situation is serious, but there is no need to panic. What is important now is to remain calm, follow the instructions of the veterinary authorities, strengthen biosecurity on your farm and make sure that the information you are receiving comes from reliable sources. Don't be tempted by making a quick buck on a black-market meat trade! People who are taking chances on smuggling meat of cloven hooved animals are putting our country's economy at severe risk – penalties will be appropriate and well deserved!

What is the current situation?

Clinical sings of FMD were detected on 22 September 2026 on a commercial cattle farm in the Karasburg State Veterinary District in the //Kharas Region. On 23 September, laboratory tests confirmed 10 positive samples out of 11 that were collected from cattle showing clinical signs on the farm.

Following Namibia's notification of the outbreak, WOAH[1] suspended Namibia's FMD-free-zone status where vaccination is not practised, with effect from 22 September 2026.

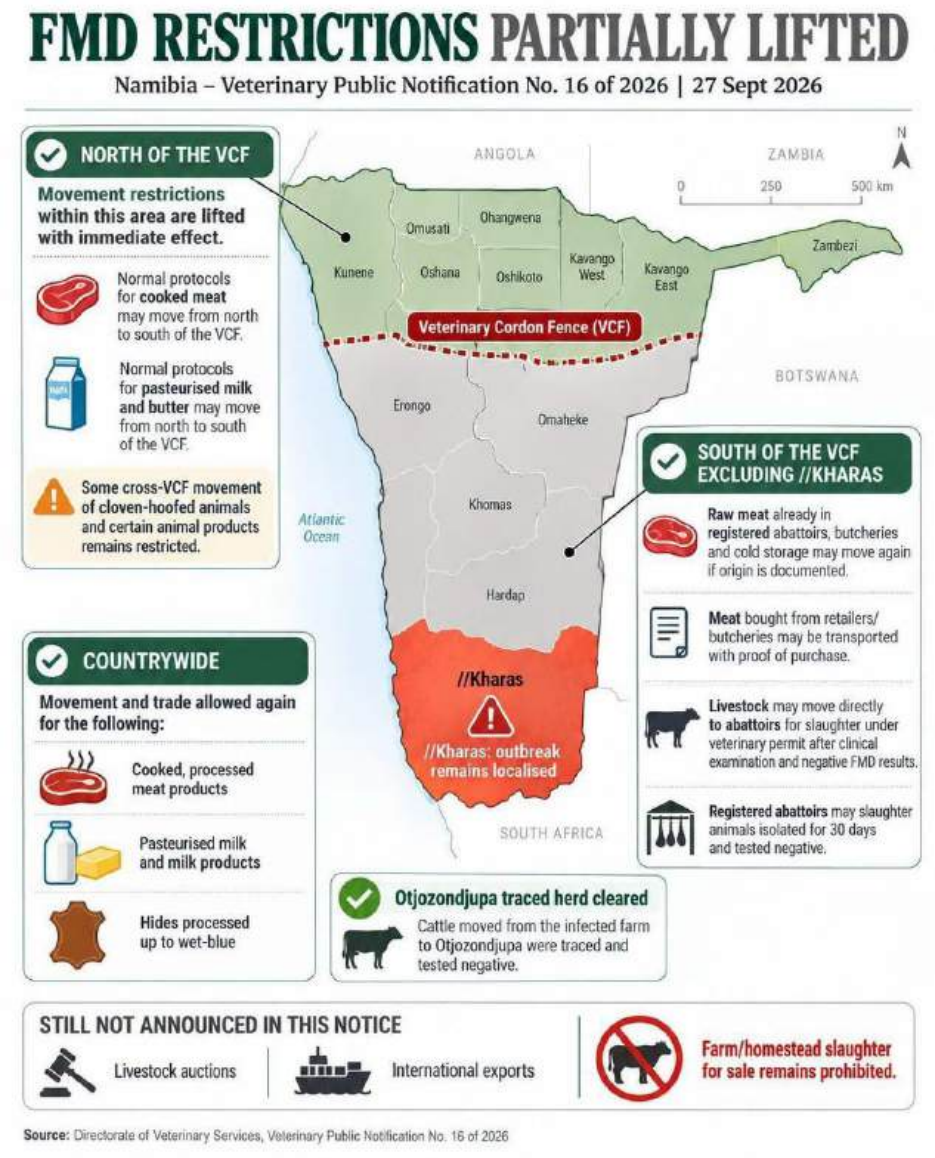
Traceability activities then identified that 4 cattle were moved from the infected farm to the Otjozondjupa Region. This is why tracing animal movements and contacts is an important part of the current investigation! On 24 September, 30 additional samples were collected during clinical examinations. These included the 4 cattle from the infected farm, and 26 animals with no known connection to the farm of origin. All 30 samples tested negative.

Surveillance has since been intensified. Between 22 and 25 September, a total of 199 samples were collected from several areas: Karasburg (||Kharas): 117 samples, Windhoek (Khomas): 1 sample, Gobabis (Omaheke): 50 samples, Otjiwarongo (Otjozondjupa): 30 samples, Ondangwa (Oshana): 1 sample.

[1] World Organisation for Animal Health

Of these 199 samples, 17 samples have tested positive for FMD. Important, all positive samples reported so far remain confined to the Karasburg State Veterinary District! Samples are also being collected from other areas as part of the intensified surveillance programme.

Namibia has activated its national FMD contingency plan (see also attached to this email). The Directorate of Veterinary Services (DVS), has introduced extensive control measures, including restrictions on the movement and marketing of cloven-hoofed animals and their raw products, as well as restrictions on imports, exports and slaughter. Roadblocks and increased surveillance also have been implemented.



These measures have major implications for livestock farmers, the meat industry, hunting and game-farming operations. However, we urge you to comply with these measures until we get more information!

Do not panic, but also do not become complacent

FMD is highly contagious, and it can have serious economic consequences. However, hearing about an outbreak does not mean that every farm in Namibia has FMD! Currently, the confirmed positive samples reported by the authorities remain within the Karasburg State Veterinary District.

DVS is continuing its investigations, including tracing possible animal movements and contacts. The 14-day incubation period is still ongoing, which means that animals that have been exposed, could potentially be infected before showing obvious clinical signs. This is why continued surveillance and movement controls are so important and we now have to comply with the current restrictions.

The Ministry has indicated that, once the surveillance results have been assessed, certain restrictions may be gradually eased. Any changes will be communicated through official veterinary notices. As of 27 September, the FMD restrictions north of the Red Line have been lifted (see left), and south of the VCF partially.

The best thing farmers can do is stay informed, follow official movement restrictions and take sensible biosecurity precautions.

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Social media and WhatsApp groups can be useful for sharing information, but they can also spread outdated or incorrect information very quickly. A message that was correct two days ago, may no longer be correct today. Before forwarding information, check where it came from and when it was published.

What can farmers do on their farms?

Control movement on your farm

Know who is coming onto your property and why. Where possible:

- Limit unnecessary visitors.
- Keep a record of visitors and vehicles.
- Avoid unnecessary movement of people between livestock/game farms.
- Ask visitors where they have recently been, particularly if they have visited other farms or livestock facilities in the south.
- Follow all current DVS movement restrictions and do not move cloven-hoofed animals without the required veterinary authorisation.

Pay attention to clothing, boots, equipment and vehicles

FMD can spread not only through infected animals, but also through contaminated vehicles, equipment, clothing and footwear. A person does not have to carry an infected animal to potentially move the virus. Mud, manure, saliva and other animal material can also contaminate. Think of things like:

- Boots
- Clothes
- Vehicles – pay special attention to: livestock trucks and trailers, farm vehicles, contractors' vehicles, hunting vehicles and veterinary vehicles
- Trailers
- Handling equipment
- Loading ramps and pens

Where appropriate, have dedicated farm boots and clothing for workers and visitors. Clean off visible dirt and organic material before applying a suitable disinfectant. Vehicles and equipment should be cleaned and disinfected appropriately, especially after contact with livestock or potentially contaminated areas.

Understand the disease and its signs

FMD is a highly contagious viral disease affecting cloven-hoofed animals, including cattle, sheep, goats, pigs and wildlife such as buffalo and antelope. FMD does not infect humans.

The virus can be transmitted through infected animals and their saliva, milk and other secretions, but also through contaminated vehicles, equipment, clothing, boots, feed and water. Animal movement is one of the most important ways in which FMD can spread between farms.

Typical signs in cattle include:

- Fever and loss of appetite
- Excessive drooling
- Blisters and sores in the mouth and around the nose and teats
- Lesions around the feet and between the claws
- Lameness
- Reduced milk production

Classical signs of FMD in cattle include blisters and sores in the mouth and nose, on the feet and on teats. FMD is very painful and causes salivation, nasal discharge and loss of appetite. From left to right: © Eufmd, NDSU

Sheep and goats may show very mild signs or no obvious signs at all, making them more difficult to detect. Wildlife can also become infected. If you see animals showing suspicious signs, contact your State Veterinarian immediately. DO NOT try to hide a possible outbreak on your farm!! Since the disease is so highly contagious, any delay in reporting an outbreak will result in an exponential spread of the disease, which will make things much worse.

For more info on FMD, read our January and February 2026 newsletters, and see the attachments to this email.

Report free-moving livestock and illegal animal movements

Free-roaming livestock can come into contact with animals from other farms, and potentially spread disease across farms. Knowing where animals have been, and controlling their movement is particularly important for FMD prevention and disease tracing.

Report free-roaming livestock to your nearest State Veterinarian. If possible, take a photo and record the location. If you see livestock being transported during the current ban, take a photo of the vehicle and number plate, note the location, and report it to the veterinary authorities.

One farm at the time

It is easy to feel helpless when faced with a national disease outbreak. But every farmer has an important role to play.

Good biosecurity on your farm protects not only your farm, but also neighbouring farms, the livestock industry and Namibia's wildlife and hunting sectors.

For now, the message is simple:

Stay calm. Stay informed. Follow the veterinary regulations. Strengthen your biosecurity. Report anything suspicious. Do not spread unverified information.

The situation is developing, and measures may change as surveillance results become available. Always check the latest communication from DVS or your State Veterinarian before making decisions about animal movement, marketing, hunting or other activities involving cloven-hoofed animals.

If you have questions about FMD or biosecurity on your farm, please feel free to contact us:

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NAPHA has published a valuable resource on their website titled "*FMD – Practical Suggestions for Managing Game Meat and Reducing Waste*." It offers clear, practical guidance for farmers, hunters, and game farm operators on how to handle game meat responsibly while reducing waste, especially in the context of the FMD outbreak.

For more information about the disease, have a look at FMD Support Fund of Namibia.

OWL EARS: HEARING IN THE DARK

Owls are well-known for their incredible ability to hunt in the dark. Their eyes play an important role, but their ears are just as remarkable! Many owl species can locate their prey species just by sound. How do they do this?

The southern white-faced owl has two prominent ear tufts on its head. These tufts are made of feathers and can be raised or lowered depending on the owl's mood or threat level. © M. Bijsterbosch

Unlike many mammals, owls do not have obvious external ears. Those little 'horns' or 'tufts' you see on some species are not ears at all! They are just feathers, officially called '*plumicorns*' (*pluma* = soft feather and *corn* = horn). Scientists believe plumicorns help with camouflage and communication, but they play no role in hearing. During resting, the owl may tuck its plumicorns in, so the owl blends against the bark and branches. When awake, the owl uses them for communicating with other owls or species. Straight up means alert, when tucked in, the owl could be angry or defensive.

The real ears of the owl are hidden lower down on the sides of the head, roughly at eye level. In some owl species, such as the barn owl, the ears are a-symmetrical; the one ear is higher than the other ear. This clever design allows the owl to detect tiny differences in when a sound reaches a particular ear first. The brain then calculates the exact direction of the sound, so the owl can pinpoint the location of the sound.

Another important adaptation that goes hand in hand with the ears, is the facial disk. This is a curved ring of stiff feathers around the face, that acts basically as a satellite disk and funnels the sound towards the ears. Owls can even change the position of some of these feathers to improve their hearing!

Above; The ears and ear canals are a-symmetrical in some owl species. This unique design allows them to pinpoint sounds not only left or right, but also above or below. © Acoustics First
On the right; Thalia, a young barn owl that was found, rescued and released back into the wild © Emily Tubbesing

HOW TO PROTECT ORYX HORNS DURING TRANSPORT...

Last month, we shared a video of the Simon Wildlife Services team fitting protective plastic pipes over the horns of several immobilized oryx before transport. These oryx were moved to another farm, and as you know, oryx have long and sharp horn tips. When several horned animals are confined together during transport, there is a real risk of them injuring one another, or damaging and even breaking their horns.

The plastic pipes provide a simple but effective solution. The bottom of the pipes are heated up to make them slightly more flexible. They are then fitted over the horn tips to be seated on the horn rings at the base and tapped into place, to ensure that they stay on for the entire journey. When they are fitted loosely, they will come of halfway the trip and won't provide protection. It might not look pretty, but it is a simple and effective preventative measure for their own safety. This technique is also used on other horned species, such as eland and impala.

The pipes are <u>always removed</u> before the animals are offloaded.

We received quite a variety of responses to that video, and some rather *creative* suggestions on what else could be used instead of the plastic pipes! We could not resist sharing a few of those ideas for a good laugh!

Some of the suggestions; use pool noodles, put oranges on the tips (this was a joke though 😉), wrap the horns in cloths, take the horns off completely. Just so we are all on the same side, these are NOT real pictures 😂

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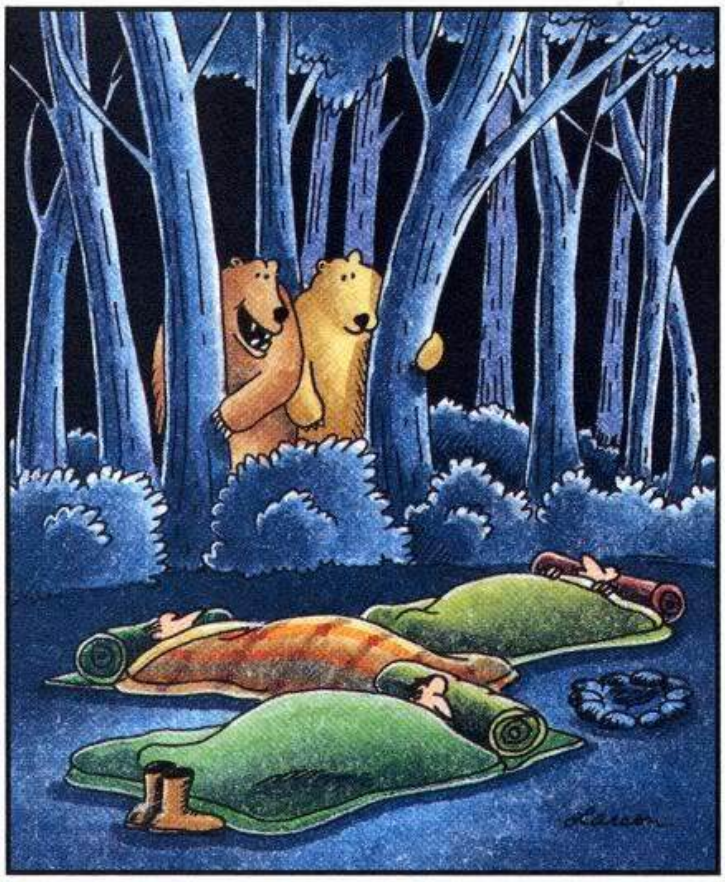

"Sandwiches!"

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