

Shortage of 3 300 health inspectors countrywide

SIYABOMGA MKHWANAZI

Health minister pledges to help in lawsuits over listeriosis

HEALTH Minister Dr. Aaron Mokoaleli has pledged to support the families of the 180 people who died of listeriosis if they proceed with legal action against the companies fingered in the outbreak of the food poisoning. Yesterday, Mokoaleli said he fully supported opposition parties' view that the companies implicated in the listeriosis outbreak should be hauled before Parliament and their

directors prosecuted.

Mokoaleli also asked Parliament to amend the constitution to give him the powers to appoint environmental health inspectors to monitor these facilities.

Speaking in the National Assembly, Mokoaleli said he supported calls by the EFF that those responsible must be prosecuted.

Laws were there to ensure accountability by the companies, Mokoaleli said, adding that his department would help community members who wanted to sue the companies implicated.

He acknowledged that there was a shortage of environmental health inspectors. "We have a serious shortage of environmental health

inspectors because that function was given to local government in 1996.

"It was a mistake to give that job to municipalities, because they can't manage it," he said.

Municipalities were already tasked with refuse collection. He noted that there was a shortage of 3 300 environmental health

inspectors in the country.

The sooner Parliament gave him the powers to oversee the inspectors, the sooner he could proceed to appoint them.

Mokoaleli was backed by the health portfolio committee chairperson Lindelwa Dunjwa, who said health inspectors should fall under the national Department of Health

and not municipalities.

Natasha Ntlangwini of the EFF said RCL Foods and Tiger Brands must come to Parliament and account.

"These people must be brought to book. It's time to do your job, minister, and hold these companies accountable," she said.

Lindy Wilson of the DA accused Mokoaleli of failing to act on time to locate the source of the disease. She said inspectors were nowhere to be found and that the

problem had escalated in front of his department's eyes.

"When last did health inspectors deal with the service providers who supply food to our children in schools?" asked Wilson.

IFP chief whip Narend Singh said it was time to look at solutions, charging that the companies responsible for the outbreak must face the might of the law.

Singh added that it was the poor and vulnerable who were victims of the disease.