

# Media Statement



Tel: +27 12 845 6000

Email:  
[media@npa.gov.za](mailto:media@npa.gov.za)

Victoria & Griffiths  
Mxenge Building  
123 Westlake Avenue  
Weavind Park  
Silverton  
Pretoria

[www.npa.gov.za](http://www.npa.gov.za)

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**TO : ALL MEDIA**

**DATE : 4 JUNE 2010**

**RE : FORMER LANDBANK EMPLOYEE AND HIS ASSOCIATES APPEAR IN COURT FOR FRAUD IN MAFISA FARM PROJECT**

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Four accused appeared in the Polokwane Regional Court yesterday after being arrested by the Hawks in connection with fraud, theft and money laundering relating to the Mafisa (Micro Agricultural Finance of South Africa) project. They are: Theo Behrens Max Mathebula, Elsa Behrens and Jacobus Coetzee, all residing around Polokwane. The fifth suspect, Ms Elize Borcheds, is still at large and a warrant for her arrest has been authorised. Theo Behrens who is accused No 1 was granted bail of R10 000, while the rest of the accused were released on warning until 21 July 2010 when a trial date will be arranged.

Mafisa was established as a loan facility to fund small and developing farmers or individuals who are aspiring to become farmers, but who must have access to farming land. It was designed to specifically benefit mostly the historically disadvantaged individuals. It was a pilot project initiated and funded by the Department of Agriculture, but managed operationally by the Landbank. The project was initially piloted around Limpopo and the Landbank's branch office was administering the operations, while Pretoria Head Office was responsible for approval of loan applications and disbursement of funds.

During the course of the investigations, allegations surfaced, suggesting that some of the Landbank Sales Consultants were colluding with other farmers allowing them to pose as mentors. These so called mentors were recruiting their own farm workers, taking their ID books to process the loan applications, promising them that they would receive the said loan in due course. Once they were informed of the approval, they redirected the funds to run their farms without the knowledge of the applicants. The Landbank has lost more than R18 million through this scheme, but for the purposes of this particular prosecution, Mr Theo Behrens benefited more than R3,5 million.

Mr Theo Behrens, accused No 1, a former Landbank employee was dismissed in December 2006 after he was found guilty at a disciplinary hearing which was related to this investigation. The allegations are that the rest of the accused were working for accused No 1 and assisted him to recruit farm workers by collecting their ID's and giving them to No 1 to process the loan applications. Accused No 4, Jacobus Coetzee, is the owner of Noordchem Close Corporation. He allegedly assisted No 1 by providing him with false invoices for submission to the Landbank. He would then receive the necessary payments as per the false invoices, but thereafter transfer the money to accused No 1's personal bank account.

The actions of the accused threaten the economic stability of the country and undermine efforts to develop small and upcoming farmers. Our law enforcement agencies, together with the NPA, will ensure that those arrested face the full force of the law.

**Enquiries:**

Adv Mthunzi Mhaga

NPA Spokesperson

072 198 6863

[mcmhaga@npa.gov.za](mailto:mcmhaga@npa.gov.za)