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EWC chair comes out in support of Agoa

23 Jun 2023 - by Staff reporter



Terry Gale, chair of Exporters Western Cape.

Terry Gale, who chairs the Exporters Western Cape (EWC), has added his voice to concerns about the growing threat of South Africa's potential expulsion from the African Growth and Opportunity Act (Agoa) because of the government's tacit support for Russia and its violation of Ukraine's sovereignty.

As with Western Cape Premier Alan Winde's recent visit to Washington, conducted to protect the province's trade benefits under Agoa, Gale has expressed his unequivocal support for the tariff-free benefits exporters have under the act.

In a statement sent to *Freight News*, Gale said: "Not only will the citrus and deciduous fruit industries be adversely affected, but our wine also, which is now making great inroads into the US market."

What appeared to be an imminent threat, especially following recent news out of the US that senators and influential policy executives were making pronouncements against trade with South Africa, couldn't possibly have come at a worse time, Gale argued.

He said this was particularly evident in the case of wine exports, growing on the back of a prestigious award won by the cabernet sauvignon of Le Riche Wines at the Decanter World Wine Awards 2023 earlier this month.

“The wine and agricultural industries are labour intensive, not to mention wine tourism that creates thousands of jobs,” Gale said.

He added: “On the manufacturing side, EWC is aware of a number of our exporters who, thanks to the US Consulate in Cape Town, had visas issued in record time so they can ensure their US importers that the Western Cape is in this for the long haul.

“This is where Premier Winde showed his mettle and supported industry, by taking the initiative and visiting Washington DC to address the issue personally – not waiting to put together a delegation!”

Gale said it was interesting that President Cyril Ramaphosa had said nothing about Winde’s Washington visit, widely viewed as break-away diplomacy by the DA-led province.

Instead, it was left to the presidential spokesperson, Vincent Magwenya, to comment, saying as he did that Winde was not supposed to get involved in matters of trade at a national level.

Gale said: “The US is the Western Cape’s second-biggest and most profitable trading partner.”

More importantly, he pointed out that the US was the only positive-balance-of-payments trading partner the province had, thanks to the benefits of Agoa.

Gale said there was much more at stake than the loss of jobs if South Africa was expelled from Agoa, an act that was signed into law by erstwhile US President Bill Clinton back in 2000.

“Our global trading integrity and respect, which has taken Brand SA many years to build, will be destroyed in one fell swoop.

“We are already the laughingstock of the world thanks to the bungling of the recent visit to Russia and Ukraine, so why blot our copybook even more?”

He said that more should be done to ensure that the act remained in place, and that the Agoa Forum scheduled to be held at the Cape Town International Conference Centre (CTICC) towards the end of the year went ahead.

“The CTICC is waiting,” Gale said.

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