

COMPETITION TRIBUNAL
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Case No: 43/CR/Jun11

In the matter between:

The Competition Commission

Applicant

and

Suidwes Agriculture (Pty) Ltd

Respondent

Panel : N Manoim (Presiding Member), Y Carrim (Tribunal Member), and A Wessels (Tribunal Member)

Heard on : 16 August 2011

Decided on : 16 August 2011

Order

The Tribunal hereby confirms the order as agreed to and proposed by the Competition Commission and the respondent, annexed hereto marked "A".



Presiding Member
N Manoim

Concurring: Y Carrim and A Wessels

2011-03-03

RECEIVED BY: *Mq Tom*

TIME: *15:00*

competition tribunal
south africa

IN THE COMPETITION TRIBUNAL OF SOUTH AFRICA
HELD IN PRETORIA

CT Case No.
CC Case No. 2009Mar4349

In the matter between:

THE COMPETITION COMMISSION

Applicant

and

SUIDWES AGRICULTURE (PTY) LIMITED

5th Respondent

In re:

COMPETITION COMMISSION

Applicant

and

AFGRI OPERATIONS LIMITED
SEWES LIMITED
NWK LIMITED
OVK OPERATIONS LIMITED
SUIDWES AGRICULTURE (PTY) LIMITED
VRYSTAAT KOÖPERASIE BEPERK
OVERBERG AGRI (PTY) LIMITED
DIE HUMANSDORPSE KOÖPERASIE BEPERK
SENTRAAL-SUID KOÖPERASIE BEPERK
GWK LIMITED
KAAP AGRI BEDRYF LIMITED
MGK BEDRYFSMAATSKAPPY (PTY) LIMITED
TUINROETE AGRI BEPERK
MOREESBURGSE KORINGBOERE (EDMS) BEPERK
TWK LANDBOU BEPERK
NTK LIMPOPO AGRIC BEPERK
GRAIN SILO INDUSTRY

1st Respondent
2nd Respondent
3rd Respondent
4th Respondent
5th Respondent
6th Respondent
7th Respondent
8th Respondent
9th Respondent
10th Respondent
11th Respondent
12th Respondent
13th Respondent
14th Respondent
15th Respondent
16th Respondent
17th Respondent

CONSENT AGREEMENT IN TERMS OF SECTION 49D READ WITH SECTION 58(1)(a)(iii) and 58(1)(b) OF THE COMPETITION ACT, 1998 (ACT NO. 89 OF 1998), AS AMENDED, BETWEEN THE COMPETITION COMMISSION ("THE COMMISSION") AND SUIDWES AGRICULTURE (PTY) LIMITED ("SUIDWES"), IN RESPECT OF AN ALLEGED CONTRAVENTION OF SECTION 4(1)(b)(i) OF THE COMPETITION ACT, 1998 ("THE ACT").

The *Commission* and *Suidwes* hereby agree that application be made to the *Tribunal* for the confirmation of this *Consent Agreement* in terms of section 58(1)(a)(iii) as read with section 58(1)(b) of the Competition Act, 1998 (Act No. 89 of 1998), as amended, on the terms set out below:

1. **Definitions**

For the purposes of this *Consent Agreement* the following definitions shall apply:

- 1.1. **"Act"** means the Competition Act, No. 89 of 1998, as amended;
- 1.2. **"Commission"** means the Competition Commission of South Africa, a statutory body established in terms of section 19 of the *Act*, with its principal place of business at 1st Floor, Mulayo Building (Block C), the dti Campus, 77 Meintjies Street, Sunnyside, Pretoria, Gauteng;
- 1.3. **"Commissioner"** means the Commissioner of the Commission, appointed in terms of section 22 of the *Act*;
- 1.4. **"Complaint"** means the complaint under case number 2009Mar4349 initiated by the *Commissioner* in terms of section 49B of the *Act*, including a complaint concerned with allegations of price fixing in terms of section 4(1)(b)(i) of the *Act* initiated on 17 March 2009 as well as an expanded initiation on 25 May 2010 after the decision was made to include all the members and shareholders of the Grain Silo Industry;
- 1.5. **"Consent Agreement"** means this agreement duly signed and concluded between the *Commission* and *Suidwes*;
- 1.6. **"Grain Silo Industry"** means Grain Silo Industry (Pty) Ltd ("GSI"), a private company duly incorporated in accordance with the company laws of the Republic of South Africa, having its registered offices at Lynwood Corporate Park, Alkantrantstraat, Lynwood Manor, Pretoria, Gauteng Province. The GSI represents its members in public forums wherein matters related to the storage and trading of grain and oilseeds are discussed and provides specialist research services that members may request on an ad-hoc basis. The GSI represents its constituent members in

interactions with the Agricultural Products Division of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (the "APD" previously "SAFEX").

- 1.7. **"Suidwes"** means Suidwes Agriculture (Pty) Limited, a private company registered and incorporated in accordance with the laws of the Republic of South-Africa with registration number 1990/006879/07 and with its registered office and main place of business at 5 Voortrekker Street, Leeudoringstad, North West, 2640.
- 1.8. **"Parties"** means the *Commission* and *Suidwes*;
- 1.9. **"Respondent"** means for purposes of this agreement *Suidwes*;
- 1.10. **"Respondents"** means Respondents one (1) to seventeen (17) described above;
- 1.11. **"SAFEX"** means the South African Futures Exchange which was established to provide market participants with a price determination mechanism and a price risk management facility through which they can manage their exposure to adverse price movements in the underlying commodity.
- 1.12. **"Tribunal"** means the Competition Tribunal of South Africa, a statutory body established in terms of section 26 of the Act, with its principal place of business at 3rd Floor, Mulayo building (Block C), the dtf Campus, 77 Meintjies Street, Sunnyside, Pretoria, Gauteng.

2. The Complaint and Complaint Investigation

- 2.1. On 17 March 2009 the *Commissioner* initiated a complaint against Afgri Operations Limited ("Afgri"), Senwes Limited ("Senwes"), Noord-Wes Koöperasie Limited ("NWK"), OVK Operations Limited ("OVK"), *Suidwes*, Vrystaatse Koöperasie Limited ("VKB") and the GSI for alleged contravention of section 4(1)(b)(i) of the Act.
- 2.2. The investigation revealed that the storage rate is agreed to and assented to not only by the entities against whom the original complaints initiation was made, but by all members and shareholders of GSI. In the

circumstances, on 25 May 2010 the *Commissioner* expanded the investigation to refer to all seventeen (17) respondents.

2.3. The *Commission* conducted its investigation and concluded that:

2.3.1. the *respondents* and GSI have contravened section 4(1)(b)(i) of the *Act*. The essence of the conduct complained of is that the respondents and GSI have contravened section 4(1)(b)(i) of the *Act* in that they fix the prices of the daily storage tariff for the storage of grain. This is done for application throughout the Republic. The first to sixteenth *respondents* are all former cooperatives who own grain storage silos and provide other agricultural services and are competitors in the market for grain storage.

2.4. The *Commission* found that:

2.4.1. Notwithstanding the fact that they are competitors, the first to sixteenth *respondents* are all shareholders or members of the GSI. Although the GSI is a private company, it amounts to an industry association for members of the grain storage industry. SAFEX placed the onus for the determination of the storage rate on the GSI on the basis that it had the necessary knowledge and understanding of the costs involved in providing storage. Until 2008, SAFEX requested the standardised tariff from the GSI on an annual basis. In 2008, as is set out below, the GSI declined to provide the standardised storage tariff to SAFEX any longer on account of the *Commission's* contentions that it and its members were contravening section 4(1)(b)(i) of the *Act*.

2.4.2. It was the GSI's technical committee that was responsible for fixing the daily storage tariff on behalf of the GSI and its members. In response to requests from SAFEX, the GSI consulted its shareholders. The shareholders submitted individual proposals as to the appropriate storage rate to GSI. These rates were collated and evaluated by the GSI's technical committee, the members of which are from competing silo companies. The technical committee then



decided on a rate and this was then submitted to *SAFEX* on behalf of GSI and its shareholders.

2.4.3. The essence of the conduct complained of is that the daily storage tariff proposed by GSI is agreed to and assented to by all of the respondents. Given that the first to sixteenth respondents are all competitors in the provision of storage services, the joint determination of the daily storage rate amounts to prohibited price fixing in that it quite simply amounts to an agreement between firms in a horizontal relationship for the direct fixing of storage prices.

2.4.4. The manner in which the *SAFEX* storage tariff is determined is, in the Commission's view, restrictive of competition. In addition to agreeing to the *SAFEX* rate, the respondents exchanged detailed cost information. In addition, the storage tariff determined for *SAFEX* purposes has been used to determine storage fees in respect of sales transactions in the physical market. This amounts to collusion.

2.5. The *Commission* took a decision to refer to the *Tribunal* its complaint that is described above.

3. Statement of conduct by Suidwes


3.1 *Suidwes* admits that, as a member of the GSI, it participated to a very limited extent in agreeing on the standardised daily grain storage tariffs which were recommended to *SAFEX*.

3.2 It agrees that its conduct as described above may have been in contravention of section 4(1)(b)(i) of the *Act*.

4. Administrative Penalty

4.1. Having regard to the provisions of sections 58(1)(a)(iii) as read with sections 59(1)(a), 59(2) and 59(3) of the *Act*, *Suidwes* accepts that a contravention of section 4(1)(b)(i) may lead to the imposition of an administrative penalty where the *Tribunal* deems it appropriate.

4.2. In order to settle the matter, the parties have agreed that *Suidwes* will pay an administrative penalty in the amount of R 4 644 617.65.

Two handwritten signatures are present at the bottom right of the page. The first signature is a stylized, cursive mark, and the second is a more elaborate, flowing signature.

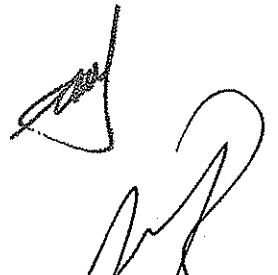
- 4.3. This amount does not exceed 10% (ten percent) of the total grain silo storage turnover of *Suidwes* for the 2009 financial year.
- 4.4. *Suidwes* will pay the amount set out in paragraph 4.2 above to the *Commission* in three consecutive payments as follows:
- 4.4.1 R1 000 000 within 30 days of confirmation of this *Consent Agreement* by the *Tribunal*;
- 4.4.2 R1 000 000 on or before 31 December 2011; and
- 4.4.3 R 2 644 617.65 on or before 30 June 2012.
- 4.5. This payment shall be made ~~into~~ the *Commission's* bank account, details of which are as follows:

Bank name: Absa Bank
Branch name: Pretoria
Account holder: Competition Commission Fees Account
Account number: 4050778576
Account type: Current Account
Branch Code: 323 345

- 4.6. The payment will be paid over by the *Commission* to the National Revenue Fund in accordance with section 59(4) of the *Act*.

5. Agreement Concerning Future Conduct

- 5.1. *Suidwes* agrees to fully cooperate with the *Commission* in relation to the prosecution of the complaint referral. Without limiting the generality of the foregoing, *Suidwes* specifically agrees to:
- 5.1.1. Testify in the complaint referral (if any) in respect of alleged contraventions covered by this *Consent Agreement*; and



- 5.1.2. To the extent that it is in existence, provide evidence, written or otherwise, which is in its possession or under its control, concerning the alleged contraventions contained in this *Consent Agreement*.
- 5.2. *Suidwes* agrees that it will in future refrain from the provision of contractual undertakings that have the potential to constitute contraventions of section 4(1)(b) of the *Act*.
- 5.3. *Suidwes* shall develop, implement and monitor a competition law compliance programme incorporating corporate governance designed to ensure that its employees, management, directors and agents do not engage in future contraventions of the *Act*. In particular, *Suidwes* shall:
- 5.3.1. draft and implement a competition policy and compliance programme;
- 5.3.2. provide training on competition law compliance on issues particularly relevant to *Suidwes* and its employees and officials;
- 5.3.3. provide training on competition law compliance to all persons and/or officials employed by *Suidwes* after the confirmation of this *Consent Agreement* by the *Tribunal*;
- 5.3.4. update the competition policy and training annually to ensure *Suidwes's* continued compliance with the *Act*.
- 5.4. *Suidwes* shall submit a copy of such compliance programme to the Commission within 60 days of the date of confirmation of the *Consent Agreement* by the *Tribunal*.

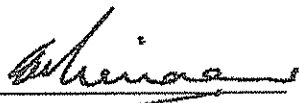
6. **Full and Final Settlement**

This agreement, upon confirmation as an order by the *Tribunal*, is entered into in full and final settlement and concludes all proceedings between the *Commission* and *Suidwes* relating to any alleged contravention by the *Respondents* of the *Act* that is the subject of the *Commission's* investigation under case no 2009MAR4349.

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For Suidwes

Dated and signed at *Keedoringstad* on the 25th day of *July* 2011.


Managing Director

For the Commission

Dated and signed at *Pretoria* on the 29th day of *July* 2011.


Competition Commissioner