



# THATCHERS ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH AFRICA DEKKERSVERENIGING VAN SUID-AFRIKA

Newsletter 3/2014  
12 May 2014

## NEWSLETTER

Dear TASA member

### **TASA QUO VADIS?**

The 2014 Annual General Meeting is around the corner and the planned projects which will benefit the TASA and its members must get off the ground. The Agenda of the AGM will be sent to you once it has been finalized.

The Annual General Meeting will be held on Saturday, 7 June 2014 at Impangele Lodge in Muldersdrift near Lanseria International Airport. The cost of accommodation for persons sharing is R350 per person per night. Further costs regarding meals, meeting, etc. will be made available during this week.

### **Problems to be focused on**

If the complaints received are any indication of the current state of the Thatching Industry, the alarming conclusion must be that our members are caught in an unfortunate battle for survival. Every year we lose more and more members due to two factors: Members who do not have the means to renew their membership and complaints received due to poor workmanship

The TASA is immensely appreciative of those members who immediately follow up on complaints with their clients to set the record straight, while others decided not to renew their membership and to operate on their own.

The procedure followed when complaints against members are received are set out in the Complaints Procedure. These complaints are treated very carefully and the Administrative Officer is careful not to make any comments that may be detrimental to the member.

The following proposal was received from one of the TASA's executive members: "I think that in the case of a dispute it would be better that another member of the TASA enter at a lower fee to help resolve the issue. A more senior contractor can even be asked to intervene and, under his supervision, rectify the problem. In this way the member retains his standing in the eyes of the public."

The "old" Technical Committee has been disbanded as a result of problems arising between certain members. The TASA even attempted to appoint mentors to assist and advise members who required assistance, but even this resulted in problems and the cancellation of the contractor - and mentor's membership.

We would like to hear what your views are regarding the above. We will be able to pull through by standing together and assisting each other.

The number of complaints that resulted in lawsuits, especially those of non-members increased. Mr. Abe Stears of SATAS (South African Technical Auditing Services) and Mr Mike Hull (Hull Consulting Engineers) were recommended to deal with complaints, since the TASA do not engage in disputes between contractors and their clients. TASA is a Society and has no legal personality.

The largest percentage of complaints received was due to construction problems and immature thatch harvested during the rainy season. There are members who still do not adhere to the SANS 10407 specification requirements and ignore the correct installation procedures for fibreglass ridges. The lack of approved plans and rational designs complicate the sign-off of roofs by competent persons.

A court case is underway due to a "competent" person who has signed off a roof (built without approved plans and / or rational design) with construction problems that became life threatening. Our members are really urged not to take shortcuts that later cause big problems for themselves and their clients.

Solutions to these problems must be found, but it is not only in South Africa for example, that problems with poor quality thatch / reed occur. In other countries where thatch material is bought up and stored in warehouses where it is purchased by contractors, strict measures are implemented. For example, records must be kept of the date and source where the thatch was purchased, and also when and where the thatch was harvested.

The old Thatchers Association (before the re-establishment of the current Association) at one stage attempted to establish a storing facility, but the weighing and checking of loads gave rise to problems. Complaints are mainly received from the Free State and North West of thatch harvested during the rainy season. There are many members who purchase this thatch because they were not in a financial position to buy the previous season's thatch, or do not have a storage facility. The Annual General Meeting provides an opportunity for these issues to be addressed.

Opportunity and the need for such a thatch / reed distribution facility in South exists where contractors can purchase quality thatching material, especially in light of the large amount of thatch available in Lesotho.

Comments on the above reads: "Why did someone not start a thatch depot exclusively for TASA members? Members may even be invited to buy shares in it. Enough thatch can be purchased to save even for the lean times when there is no thatch available. "

We would like to earnestly ask our members to attend the AGM so that we may plan ahead together in order to protect and help our members when the need arises.

## **INTERESTING INFORMATION FROM THE NETHERLANDS**

### **The reed roofing market in the Netherlands.**

We are ones in a while asked about the market for thatching jobs in Holland. There is to the EIM (Economic Institute Middle sized) research done in 1999 and 2004. Here is a summary. (From: EIM 1999 and 2004 Structure Research roofing industry supplemented by other sources). In Holland we only thatch with water reed.

In the Netherlands, every year 33 million square meters of roof are made. 24 million square meters of this is flat roof (plastic, epdm and bitumen). 8 to 9 million square meters is of sloping tiled roofs

Reed and slates are both good for only 350,000 square meters of (new) roof.  
In the years 1990 to 2000, 80,000 homes were built. Annual average  
In 2000 till 2008 there was less built, on average 60,000 homes per year.  
Today there are only 45.000 houses build (we are in a building recession in Holland)

For the production of the 350,000 square meters thatched roof (1999) 4 million reed bundles were needed.  
A survey in 2003 showed that 6.5 million bundles were processed in that year.  
So 2,5 million bundles (6,5-4) of reed have gone in re-thatching of existing houses.  
In 2006, it grew to about 8 million and to 8.7 million reed bundles in 2007.  
The amount of thatching jobs done, grows over the years in the same proportion as the bundles of reed that are used. (In 2007 700.000 square meters of thatched roof must have been made.)

In 1995, Netherlands has 1470 roofing companies. In 1999, 1840 roofing companies.  
700 of these companies (38%) do not specialize and create several types of roofs.  
160 (9%) are pitched roofs with roof tiles 700 (38%) to make a flat roof, in particular with bitumen.  
In 1999 the Netherlands had 280 Thatching companies  
(this is 15% of the total number of roofers companies).

The total turnover in the roofing industry in 1998 was 2.75 billion guilder (= 1.242 million euro's).  
The total turnover of the thatching companies was only 3% of that amount, which is 38 million Euros.  
The average revenue per thatching company is 136,000 Euro (in the year 1998).  
40 to 45% of these are materials (58.000, -) and 55 to 60% of this amount is salary (78.000, -).  
7% of the turnover a thatching company achieves with other activities such as masonry and carpentry.

In 1999 the Netherlands had 280 thatching companies. The average company has 2.9 members of staff.  
There were 1999 745 thatchers working on the roof which spent 40 hours each week on the roof.  
37% of revenue is derived from total new housing.  
45% of sales come from new roofs on existing buildings and  
18% of revenue comes from repair and maintenance.

81% of revenue comes from private homes for permanent residence.  
19% of sales come from other objects (such as stables and barns, haystacks, business premises and holiday houses) 2% of sales were made abroad (mainly Germany and Belgium).

The Thatching industry has grown significantly between 1999 and the present.  
Look for this at the amount of processed bundles of reed:  
4 million in 1999, 6.5 million in 2003, 8 million in 2006,  
2007 and 2008, both 8.7 million bundles of reed.

the membership of the Federation of Thatchers as a society gives this same development.  
The number of members were in: 1997-183, 1999-200, 2008-255.  
The total number of thatching companies in Holland in: 1999-280, 2004-335, 2008-425.  
The number of full-time employees:  
1999-665 (all Dutch) and in 2008-1480 (of which 1100 Dutch and 380 foreigners).

In 1997 we had two segments in the thatching market each about 50% of turnover:  
1 - houses and other (business) most buildings in urban areas.  
2 - farmhouses, farmers buildings with stables, barns and haystacks  
these of course outside the urban areas and in the countryside.

There is added a 3rd segment after 1997 which is that of holiday homes, privately owned and in big developments for renting out to people on holidays.

We also had a slump in the thatched housing industry as a direct result from the credit crunch.  
In Holland we had more or less the same problems in the housing market as the USA.  
But because an owner cannot walk away from the house and the mortgage the slump in pricing was much slower, but also longer.

It is best when you calculate everything in bundles of reed  
1999 we used more than 4 million bundles of reed = 400.000 square meters of thatch.  
2003 we used more than 6,5 million bundles of reed = 650.000 square meters of thatch.  
2006 we used more than 8 million bundles of reed = 800.000 square meters of thatch.  
2007 and 2008 we used more than 8.77 million bundles of reed = 870.000 square meters of thatch.  
this was the top.

2009 we used more than 8 million bundles of reed = 800.000 square meters of thatch.  
2010 we used more than 7 million bundles of reed = 700.000 square meters of thatch.  
2011 we used more than 7 million bundles of reed = 700.000 square meters of thatch.  
2012 we used more than 5,8 million bundles of reed = 580.000 square meters of thatch.  
2013 we used more than 6 million bundles of reed = 600.000 square meters of thatch.  
2014 We see the market for thatch is slowly getting better. We expect to use between 6 and 8 million bundles of reed to be used in Holland every year over the next 10 years. We expect a growth of 1,5% in 2014 and 5,5% in 2015, 16 and 17.

As of 2008, there are increasingly numbers of foreign thatchers returning to their country of origin. (there were at the top in Holland about 400 foreigners working as thatchers on the roof, often employed by Dutch thatching companies).  
Because of this, the Dutch thatcher is until now not much affected in square meters by the crisis. But the prices paid for thatching jobs are not good as from 2009.

### **How many thatched houses are there in the Netherlands?**

There are no exact figures known. But we can make a comprehensive assessment.

First a calculation over the used bundles of reed:

In 2008 there were 8 million bundles of reed used = 800,000 square meters of roof.

An average house is  $\pm 200$  meters square meter roof area

Then it is about  $800,000 / 200 = 4,000$  roofs a year.

The average roof will last about 30 years.

**Then, in the Netherlands there are  $30 \times 4000 = 120,000$  thatched houses (and numerous other side buildings).**

Or a calculation over de labour used:

In 2008 there are in the Netherlands 400 thatching companies with an average of 3 thatchers on the roof.

These thatchers make an average of 1500 square meters of thatched roof a year.

Then it is about  $400 \times 3 \times 1500$  square meters of thatch which is 1,680,000 square meters of roof.

An average building has  $\pm 200$  meters square meters of roof area.

Then it is about  $1,680,000 / 200 = 8400$  roofs a year.

The average roof is 30 years.

**Then, in the Netherlands  $30 \times 8400 = 252\ 000$  thatched houses (and numerous outbuildings).**

One calculation seems too high, the other too low. As always the truth lies probably in the middle:

Then there are in the Netherlands  $(120,000 + 252,000) / 2 = 186,000$  thatched houses (and numerous outbuildings).

**So there are probably more than 150,000 Netherlands thatched houses.**

Henk Horlings  
Vakfederatie Rietdekkers  
(Last updated on 12-05-2014).

### **SURVEY IN SOUTH AFRICA**

The University of Stellenbosch, a few years ago sought a similar survey, but not enough information was obtained.

This is perhaps something that the TASA can look at - if it is worthwhile.

Kind regards

Kosie Theunissen  
**NATIONAL CHAIRMAN**

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