**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**WATER AND SANITATION COMMITTEE WELCOMES RETHINK ON WAR ON LEAKS PROGRAMME**

Parliament, Wednesday, 13 February 2019 – The Portfolio on Water and Sanitation welcomes the announcement by the Department of Water and Sanitation of its commitment to rethink the model of the War on Leaks programme to ensure optimum benefit is derived from the programme.

The committee has always raised concern about the effectiveness of the programme, which has to date cost the taxpayer more than R2.6 billion without tangible impact on non-revenue water that is being lost in the value chain. Despite the programme running for the past three years, there is no concrete evidence that the R7 billion worth of water loses have has been stymied.

Furthermore, the committee remains concerned that some of the learners that were skilled through this programme have not been absorbed by municipalities across the country. “It is unfathomable that the department spends R2.6 billion to skill young South Africans, yet municipalities are not taking advantage of this investment. This is worrying, especially in the context of lack of skills at local government level,” said Mr Mlungisi Johnson, the Chairperson of the committee.

The committee also welcomes the assurance that all stipends have now been paid to leaners as the committee received a number of complaints in December last year of non-payment of stipends.

Despite these concerns, the committee is comforted by the reassurance by the Minister that work is underway with sister departments such as the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs to find a workable model that is efficient, cost-effective and fit for purpose.

Meanwhile, the committee welcomes the announcement that the department’s construction unit will take over the bucket eradication programme. The programme has stalled over the years and the committee has raised concerns around non-completion of work. Despite this, the committee has called for the unit to ensure that black local businesses in the areas where they will be working are not adversely impacted and to ensure the transfer of skills to locals as a way of skills development.

The committee has noted that both these programmes and reconfigurations are a work in progress and has requested periodic updates from the department to enable the committee to exercise its monitoring and oversight.

ISSUED BY THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNICATION SERVICES ON BEHALF OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON WATER AND SANITATION, MR MLUNGISI JOHNSON.