**BILL TO RATIONALISE MANAGEMENT OF SOUTH AFRICA’S BORDERS NEARS COMPLETION**The Border Management Authority (BMA) Bill is nearing finalisation after the Portfolio Committee on Home Affairs, today (Tuesday) accepted amendments enacted by the National Council of Provinces (NCOP) to the bill. The NCOP adopted amendments to the bill and passed it in December last year before referring it back to the National Assembly for further processing and concurrence.

Committee Chairperson Advocate Bongani Bongo made it clear that the committee accepted the amendments and would like to have the bill passed into law as soon as possible. “We would like to thank the NCOP for their work and we are also very happy at the speed with which the Minister is moving on the bill. As soon as the National Assembly opens, the matter will be tabled and debated. Parliament wants to finalise the issue of the BMA Bill as fast as possible, with the speed of a mirage,” he said.

Home Affairs Minister Dr Aaron Motsoaledi today briefed the committee on the amendments, which include removing the function of facilitating the collection of revenue within the border law enforcement area and ports of entry as this is a customs-related function to be performed by the South African Revenue Services (Sars). “This function had to be removed from the functions of the Border Management Agency. The country has only one revenue collection agency, which is Sars,” the Minister told the committee.

Another amendment to the bill is on clause 76, to make it clear that the BMA “must enter into implementation protocols with the defence force, police service and Sars within six months after the commencement of section 27 (once enacted) for the mandatory co-ordination of their respective functions within the law enforcement area and at ports of entry”.

During the department’s budget vote debate in the National Assembly last year, the Minister said the delay in processing the BMA Bill was holding back government plans to rationalise the border management system.

Currently South Africa’s borders are managed by seven different departments and entities applying 58 different laws. They are Home Affairs; the South African Police Service; the South African National Defence Force; Agriculture, Land and Rural Development; Health; Environment; and Sars. Under the proposed the Border Management Authority that the bill seeks to establish, there will be one command structure and one governance system, and the management of the borders will become rationalised.

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