**Media Statement**

**Committees Call for Leadership Stability at Water and Sanitation to Drive Revival**

**Parliament, Thursday, 21 May 2020 –**The Portfolio Committee on Human Settlements, Water and Sanitation – and the Select Committee on Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, Water and Sanitation and Human Settlements have advised that stability in leadership is critical if the Department of Water and Sanitation is to achieve set targets in its Annual Performance Plans and its 2020/25 Medium Term Strategic Plan.

“The undesirable fact is that the instability in leadership positions within the department has in many ways contributed to some of the challenges the department is facing right now. For a focused drive towards achieving the noble socio-economic goals of the department can only be achieved with a stable leadership driving strategy,” said Ms Machwene Semenya, the Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee.

There has been a significantly high turnover rate at the level of Director-General (DG) and Chief Financial Officer. The Auditor-General informed the committees that over the past six financial years, the department has had five different DGs and/or acting DGs and for most of the time, the position was occupied by an acting Director-General. The committees have urged the department to speed up appointments to these critical and strategic positions to invigorate the department, going forward.

Despite this, the committees acknowledge renewed focus within the department, especially in the transformation of the water sector, expressly on unlocking the economic potential of the previously disadvantaged, as well as improving accessibility to reliable drinking water and sanitation for the majority of South Africans. Despite this, the committees have called for tangible progress in ensuring that the three million households that do not currently have access to reliable drinking water ultimately have access. Furthermore, a new trajectory must be forged to ensure access to safe sanitation for all.

“It is unacceptable that 14.1 million people in South Africa currently do not have access to safe sanitation. During this Medium Term the department must find a way of ensuring that the limited resources that the department has are maximised for the greater good. The motto of “water is life and sanitation is dignity” can only be realised by an efficient and corruption-free department,” said Mr China Dodovu, the Chairperson of the Select Committee.

In line with this, the committees have emphasised the need for the implementation of consequence management for the officials who have contributed to the challenges that the department is facing currently. “A bright future for the department is premised on correcting the wrongs of the past,” Ms Semenya emphasised.

In line with this, the committees have committed themselves to urgently set up a meeting to get a progress report on investigations into allegations of corruption and malfeasanc**e** in the department.

Infrastructure development will continue to be an important pillar of the work of the department, especially considering that 56% of waste water treatment works, and 44% of water treatment works are in a poor or critical condition, and 11% are dysfunctional. The collaboration with municipalities in improving the functionality of water and sanitation infrastructure must be prioritised.

Likewise, both committees welcome the initiative to heighten strategies to improve the compliance to regulatory requirements regarding the Green Drop Report on wastewater systems’ compliance and Blue Drop Report on water supply systems’ compliance. Also, the plan by the department to develop and implement Acid Mine Drainage mitigation strategies is welcomed but must be implemented to halt the continued contamination of ground and surface water.

The expansion of the water resource mix in an effort to increase supply is supported, but both committees have emphasised the critical role of the Water Research Commission in driving research into viable and cost-effective ways to achieve an expanded water mix.

In terms of the socio-economic impact of water, the committees welcome the plan to speed up the water use licence application process. Also, the plan to ensure access to water by beneficiaries of the land reform programme has long been called for by successive committees overseeing the department.

The committees note the impact that the fight against Covid-19 is expected to have on the resources of the department, and the delays it might have on envisioned projects. The committees will in a future date engage the department to have a scientific projection of the impact of Covid-19 on the work of the department.

**ISSUED BY THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNICATION SERVICES ON BEHALF OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SETTLEMENTS, WATER AND SANITATION, MS MACHWENE SEMENYA – AND THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON COOPERATIVE GOVERNANCE AND TRADITIONAL AFFAIRS, WATER, SANITATION AND HUMAN SETTLEMENTS, MR CHINA DODOVU.**