**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**AGRICULTURE, LAND REFORM AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE CALLS FOR THE SUSPENSION OF FUNDS TO INGONYAMA TRUST**

**Parliament, Friday, 27 May 2020** – Portfolio Committee on Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development today considered and adopted the Budget Vote Report for the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD) and its entities.

The adoption of the department and its entities’ budget votes is part of the process of deliberating and approving the five-year strategic plans and annual performance plans, as required by the Money Bills Act of 2009.

The committee noted the overall decline in the department’s budget over the Medium Term Expenditure Framework period and the budget reduction in key departmental programmes, such as Food Security, Land Reform and Restitution, and Rural Development, which is contrary to the department’s aim and strategic focus for the medium term. This could potentially undermine service delivery in respect of the Department’s National Development Plan mandate. This reduction in the department’s budget impacts on transfers to entities, such as the Agricultural Research Council, which is not adequately funded given its essential role in ensuring up to date agricultural research and innovation.

The sectoral challenges, such as climate change, water shortages, disease outbreaks and new pests, as well as the impact of global trade competition, excellent leadership and management will be required at DALRRD to apply best practice and innovation, without compromising the core mandate and development imperatives.

During the committee’s deliberations, discussions covered issues affecting the department and its entities. One such issue is the Land Bank, which is now junk status and, although it reports to national Treasury, disburses funds to farmers in programmes of both Agriculture and Land Reform. Therefore, an accountability and monitoring and evaluation framework needs to be in place to monitor how the Land Bank utilises funds and implements its programmes. The Land Bank plays a critical role in supporting government’s transformation objectives. Therefore, there is an urgent need to restore it to a sound financial position so that it can give full effect to its mandate.

The committee further proposed the suspension or withholding of funds allocated to the Ingonyama Trust (IT) for the 2020/21 financial year, due to there being no clear programmes to deal with the empowerment of youth, women and people with disabilities in the rural communities, in line with the purpose of the Board, which is the management of the Trust for the material wellbeing of traditional communities on the Ingonyama Trust land.

A number of vacancies at the Ingonyama Trust Board (ITB) have occurred in the past year. The committee noted the suspension or precautionary leave of the Chief Executive Officer and Chief Financial Officer, together with six top officials on precautionary leave. The information on the survey of the IT land is outstanding. When the IT tabled the strategic and annual performance plans of the ITB, no budget information was included. Therefore, the status of the budget presented in the committee briefing is uncertain. The IT must table the budget, by an addendum, indicating allocation to further the purpose of the trust.

The Inter-Ministerial Task Team formed to deal with the issues of the ITB has not released a progress report on its meetings. The Minister of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development should report to the committee on the progress of the engagements. A member of the committee recommended that the IT be placed under administration. The committee noted that the IT only reports on the R22 million allocated to it and not on the revenue it receives from the issuing of mining rights, leases and levies that it collects.

The Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee on Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development, Nkosi Zwelivelile Mandela, said: “In our constitutional democracy, that model of excellence should be duplicated and implemented in all kingdoms of the country as all kingdoms contributed to the struggle for liberation. The failure of the IT to account for the R22 million allocated to it by the department is noted and therefore the committee supports the suspension of its funds until a review is done.”

Of concern to the committee is that both the former Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform had difficulties in concluding policy and legislation development processes, such as Communal Land Tenure; Preservation and Development of Agricultural Land Bill, White Paper on Land Policy and Comprehensive Producer Development Support Policy. There is lack of a clear legislative programmes with timeframes with which the department can be held accountable. This matter requires urgent attention and resolution.

The committee requested the DALRRD to streamline all farmer support programmes of both Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development to ensure resources are not duplicated and that funds go where they are needed most.

“In these difficult times and under the financial constraints government is experiencing, failure to prioritise such streamlining and budget prioritisation is tantamount to gross dereliction of duty. This will severely impact this critical sector of the economy and government’s objectives of food security, agricultural reform and transformation,” said Nkosi Mandela.

**ISSUED BY THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNICATION SERVICES ON BEHALF OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, LAND REFORM AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT, NKOSI ZWELIVELILE MANDELA.**