**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**WATER AND SANITATION DEPARTMENT QUESTIONED ON VACANT POSTS, FRAUD AND CORRUPTION**

**Parliament, Thursday, 16 July 2020** – The Standing Committee on Appropriations (SCOA) today received a briefing on the Department of Water and Sanitation’s 2020/21 special adjustments to Budget Vote 41.

The committee welcomes the reprioritisation of R1.4 billion to support the covid-19 water and sanitation intervention projects, however, the committee is extremely concerned about the large number of funded vacant posts and the impact of this on the department’s operations.  Despite the reduction of R50 million in the Cost of Employees, 470 critical senior management posts remain vacant within the department.

Cases of fraud and corruption in the department continue to make news headlines. The committee questioned the department on the number of active cases but felt that its responses were not adequate. The department was instructed to provide a report on the number of cases related to fraud and corruption, the officials involved and the number of funds recovered.

The committee raised its concerns with the continuous underspending and underperformance in the department, and while National Treasury’s Chief Director for Urban Development and Infrastructure, Ulrike Britton provided reasons about the departmental rebuilding internal controls, the committee was not convinced. The committee said that this is unacceptable as the department cannot be rebuilding since 2016/17.

The committee also raised its concern with the rollover of unspent funds, particularly as it relates to the Vaal River System (VRS) pollution assessment project and the Bucket eradication programme. Chairperson of the committee, Mr Buthelezi said that project management appears to be one of the most deficient skills in departments, and continued to question the department on when exactly the bucket system will be fully eradicated and whether the department applies the polluter-pay principle in the case of the VRS.

The committee questioned the department on the spending performance of the Regional Bulk Infrastructure Grants and the Water Services Infrastructure Grant over the last five years; as well as the interventions made by the department in cases where municipalities are constantly underspending.

The committee also questioned the cost and companies associated with the provision of water tanks. The committee believes that there is skewed ownership in the economy and continues to stress the importance of transformation and the inclusion of black-owned businesses, women, youth and people living with disabilities. The department was instructed to submit a list of companies employed by the department in terms of these criteria.

**ISSUED BY THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNICATION SERVICES ON BEHALF OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS, MR SFISO BUTHELEZI.**