**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**COMMITTEE WELCOMES PROGRESS IN RESOLVING ROOIWAL AND VAALRIVER CHALLENGES**

**Parliament, Friday, 21 August 2020 –**The Portfolio Committee on Human Settlements, Water and Sanitation has commended reported progress in resolving the discharge of wastewater into both the Vaal River and the Apies River. The committee engaged the Department of Water and Sanitation and City of Tshwane on progress in the intervention following the visit by the committee earlier this year.

The reported progress is a step in the right direction in ensuring that the people of both areas receive clean water as per the Water Act requirements, and also reverse the negative impact on the river ecology and ecosystem. “While we are encouraged by the progress, we should always be cognisant that such interventions are not the solution and also not sustainable. We should always ensure pre-emptive delivery of services and not reactive interventions,” said Ms Machwene Semenya, the Chairperson of the committee.

Regarding the Vaal River system, the committee welcomes the reprioritisation of about R1 billion towards both the repair and the upgrade of the system to enable the system to cope with increased inflow caused by development in the area. Furthermore, the committee welcomes the allocation of R647 238 305 (about R6.5 million) towards the refurbishment of three Waste Water Treatment Plant which has been the major contributor to the pollution of the river system.

The committee welcomes the work done by Ekurhuleni Water Care Company in unblocking and repair of the system, which has led to the increase in sewage flow into the Rietspruit WWTW. Furthermore, the committee welcomes the information that Module 6 of the Sebokeng Plant will be commissioned at the end of August, something which will ensure that the system can handle increased inflow of sewage.

The impact of the intervention in the area regarding employment of locals has also been welcomed by the committee. “The appointment of 600 community members as part of the labour force of the intervention will have a positive economic impact in the area. Of the 600, the appointment of 300 graduates of the War on Leaks programme represents a return on investment that government made through that scheme, which must be commended,” Ms Semenya emphasised.

In relation to the Rooiwal Waste Water Treatment Plant, the committee welcomes the fact that all disruptions caused by litigation have now been resolved and work is underway, albeit only 17% of the work has been done currently. The committee is hopeful that all the intensity of the work will increase now that level 2 of the lockdown has been declared, which will ensure an increased capacity of workforce.

Despite this, the committee is concerned by the reports of community disruptions of the work on site. The committee has called on communities to guard against being used for nefarious reasons which will have an impact on development in the area. “Genuine concerns can be addressed through appropriate structures set up by the municipality and the department. Disruptions are untenable and will delay completion of the work which will delay the provision of clean water in Hammanskraal,” Ms Semenya said.

The committee remains of the view that the department must studiously implement the “polluter pays principle” as a preventive measure against the pollution of our river systems. “The implementation of the polluter pays principle will ensure that people pay for their misdemeanours thereby reducing the occurrences of pollution of our rivers,” Ms Semenya said.

Despite the promising report, the committee committed to visiting both areas to see first-hand the reported work. “The proof of the pudding is in the eating,” Ms Semenya emphasised.

Meanwhile, the committee had to postpone items on the agenda due to late submission of information by both the Department of Human Settlements and the Housing Development Agency (HDA). The committee has a standing rule that information must be shared with the committee prior to the meeting to enable Members of Parliament enough time to interact with the report. “Due to the fact that both the department and HDA only submitted their reports today the committee resolved to postpone the matter. But we are adamant that the matters of Covid-19 procurement must be prioritised as per instruction from House Chairperson: Committees, thus we will urgently schedule those items,” Ms Semenya said.

**ISSUED BY THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNICATION SERVICES ON BEHALF OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SETTLEMENTS, WATER AND SANITATION, MS MACHWENE SEMENYA.**