**MEDIA STATEMENT: COMMITTEE CALLS ON DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS AND INFRASTRUCTURE TO STRENTHEN ITS MANDATE ON BENEFICIARIES OF EPWP**

**Parliament, Tuesday, 16 March 2021 –**The Portfolio Committee on Public Works and Infrastructure was today briefed by the Member of the National Assembly (NA), Mr Shaun August and the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure, on progress regarding the petition that was submitted to the Speaker of the NA in November 2020 to investigate a policy review that will look into developing a consistent system across municipalities, provincial governments and national government on how the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) employs job seekers.

The lack of fairness and transparency on how the participants of the EPWP get recruited was a key concern in the petition brought by Mr August. The committee was informed by Mr August that the EPWP has been consistently benefiting those loyal to councillors and the committee was also told that the councillors have turned it into an electioneering tool and people are often told by these councillors to vote for them or starve.

Mr August told the committee that one of the remedial actions that the petition proposes is the review of the EPWP policy to ensure that these programmes comply with principles of fairness and transparency and should be positioned as a poverty alleviation programme rather than a political tool.

The committee also heard from the department that the concerns raised in Mr August’s petition constitute a list of challenges that the department has identified and has been grappling with to ensure that the recruitment process for this programme is not subjected to political patronage which leads to lack of transparency due to its poorly defined criteria.

The department reported that there was, in fact, a standardised policy in place on how beneficiaries of the EPWP were employed at national, provincial, and municipal government levels. The department stated that it unfortunately did not have a necessary enforcement mandate to ensure uniform implementation across the three levels of government. Furthermore, it reported that it was doing everything in its power to ensure that the policy was properly implemented for all the projects across all the three levels of government.

The committee is encouraged with the commitment from the Deputy Minister of Public Works and Infrastructure, Ms Noxolo Kiviet, who when concurring with the morale of Mr August’s petition agreed that the programme is often politically manipulated. It has noted that the department is working to deal with this problem that undermines the objectives of the programme meant for poverty alleviation.

The Chairperson of the committee, Ms Nolitha Ntobongwana said, “As long as there is no Public Works Bill in place, it won’t be easy for the EPWP to enforce fairness, transparency, accountability and ethical conduct.”

The committee instructed the department to develop a draft Public Works Bill that will clearly state powers of coordination and mandate. The committee said the Bill should include clauses for enforcement of uniform implementation of the standardised policy at all the spheres of government.

“This needs to be addressed because this programme is meant to alleviate the plight of the vulnerable people in our society. As a committee we are keen to get quarterly reports on progress by the department in addressing all the factors this programme is faced with, and that should be done with urgency as this programme is one of the vehicles meant to create jobs for many South Africans who are currently unemployed.”

**ISSUED BY THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNICATION SERVICES ON BEHALF OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS AND INFRASTRUCTURE, MS NOLITHA NTOBONGWANA.**