**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**VACANCIES OF SENIOR MANAGERS WITHIN WATER SECTOR A MASSIVE CONCERN FOR COMMITTEE**

**Parliament, Wednesday, 31 March 2021 –**The Portfolio Committee on Human Settlements, Water and Sanitation has reiterated its concern regarding the vacancies in senior management within the water sector, a situation that creates an environment of instability and lack of strategic focus. The committee received the 2019/20 annual reports for the Water Research Commission (WRC), Trans-Caledon Tunnel Authority (TCTA) and Inkomati-Usuthu Catchment Management Area (IUCMA).

“While we welcome the general improvement in audit outcomes of the entities, we remain concerned by the clear lack of planning within the sector in relation to human resources turnover, especially at management level. Any institution requires stability at senior echelons to drive strategy and the implementation of targets. It thus remains unacceptable that the Department of Water and Sanitation is currently operating without a Director-General and Chief Financial Officer,” said Ms Machwene Semenya, the Chairperson of the committee.

Similarly, the committee is concerned that the department and board of the Inkomati-Usuthu Catchment Management Area (IUCMA) did not have a plan in place to replace the Chief Executive Officer despite the knowledge that the contract was reaching its end. We have thus instructed the department to develop a clear blueprint with timelines on the appointment of senior managers within the department and its entities.

With regard to the annual report of the Water Research Commission (WRC), the committee has re-emphasised its concerns that the critical data and research undertaken by the commission is not used for the benefit of the sector and the country. For example, the overreliance on surface water which is investment-intensive despite the abundance of ground water, which can be exploited for use in some areas.

Furthermore, the long-standing problem of pollution of our water resources remains a huge concern, especially for a water-scarce country like South Africa. “While we acknowledge the skills gap more prevalent at municipal level, we remain of the view that the WRC must play a more strategic role in making available innovative ideas to effectively deal with the problem of pollution. Furthermore, the commission must improve its cooperation with the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs and municipalities to make available innovations and technologies to remedy the challenge of pollution,” Ms Semenya emphasised.

However, the committee has criticised the department and municipalities on their continued inability to enforce the polluter pays principle, something which has led to continuous pollution of the water resource. “The sooner the department is consistent in implementing the legal framework of the polluter pays principle, the better for our water resources,” Ms Semenya said.

Regarding the Trans-Caledon Tunnel Authority (TCTA), the committee welcomes the unqualified audit opinion, especially in the context of the environment that the entity operates in, where investor confidence is critical. Furthermore, the opinion is important because of the centrality of infrastructure development to the growth of South Africa’s economy and job creation.

Despite this, the committee has, in agreement with the Office of the Auditor-General (AG), raised its concerns on the matter of royalties. The TCTA has been making royalty payments against invoices prepared by the Lesotho Highlands Development Authority and certified for payment by the RSA Delegation that reflect a higher net benefit than would have been the case if the net benefit had been recomputed by the parties in Year 2006 or 2007. The committee has called on the department to move with speed to agree on the effective date of the recomputed royalty rates to assist the entity to resolve the matter of emphasis as raised by the AG.

Also, the committee welcome the information that all debt was managed within the borrowing limits and all payment obligations were timeously met.

The committee will later in April continue interrogating annual reports of water boards to ascertain if they are implementing their mandates for the benefit of the people of South Africa.

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