**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**COMMITTEE ON COGTA CALLS ON GOVERNMENT TO ENSURE DROUGHT IN THE SARAH BAARTMAN DISTRICT MUNICIPALITY IS MANAGED EFFECTIVELY**

**Parliament, Wednesday, 2 June 2021** – The Portfolio Committee on Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (CoGTA) has called on both the Eastern Cape and national CoGTA departments to ensure that proper support is in place to assist the Sarah Baartman District Municipality to effectively manage the crippling drought threatening to destabilise the area.

The committee has noted that in Makana Local Municipality there has been signs of serious distress in terms of service delivery, administration and finance, including two consecutive disclaimers in 2018/19 and 2019/20. The violent events of last week where protesters staged a shutdown of the town are a symptom of this distress. The challenges in the municipality have recurred over long periods of time and have been highlighted repeatedly in the Auditor-General’s reports. At some point the municipality could not be entrusted with grants from national government, and the district had to manage these on its behalf.

The committee is aware of the famous Makhanda High Court order compelling the Eastern Cape Provincial Executive to intervene in the affairs of Makana Local Municipality. This has drawn much public interest, including the interest of Parliament. The Standing Committee on Public Accounts (Scopa) undertook an oversight visit to the municipality early last month and the committee noted that the municipality presented the same report it presented to Scopa. In August 2020, the municipality also appeared before the CoGTA Select Committee in the National Council of Provinces in relation to the issue of intervention. The committee hopes that the municipality is drawing lessons from these experiences and is accordingly restructuring its administration to better serve the people of Makhanda, Alicedale and Riebeek East.

The committee raised it concerns about the long list of repeat audit findings in eNdlambe Local Municipality in relation to the abuse of Supply Chain Management processes. Its Bid Adjudication Committees have not always been composed in accordance with Supply Chain Management Regulations. Awards were made to service providers in the service of other state institutions, including those in the service of the municipality itself. Persons in the service of the municipality who had a private or business interest in contracts awarded by the municipality failed to disclose such interest. And further construction contracts were awarded to contractors that did not qualify. This committee said this is an indication of a municipality that has zero regard for Supply Chain Management laws.

The committee has noted that the South African Local Government Association has dispatched a technical team to Dr Beyers Naude Local Municipality to assist the municipality out of its current quagmire. The municipality has previously appeared before this committee on 19 August 2020 following its concerns around its consecutive disclaimed audit opinions in 2018/19, 2017/18 and 2016/17. Since its inception during the 2016 demarcation cycle, the municipality has been under increasing financial pressure and has realized continuous financial losses. Dr Beyers Naude LM is a classical case study of a demarcation process that went wrong. The committee will afford the Salga technical team space to do its work and will reschedule the municipality for a report back as soon as the team concludes its intervention.

Committee Members also asked National CoGTA when they envisaged declaring a state of local disaster in respect of the drought in the Sarah Baartman District. This will enable the municipalities in the District to access relevant disaster management funding. Affected municipalities are: Dr Beyers Naude, Kou-Kamma, Kouga, Sundays River Valley, Ndlambe, Makana and Blue Crane local municipalities.

The committee was addressed by senior politicians and administrators representing the Sarah Baartman District Municipality, Auditor General Eastern Cape; Salga; national Department of Cooperative Governance (CoGTA) and the Provincial Department of CoGTA and Treasury on the state of municipalities in the Sarah Baartman District. The District Mayor, Councillor Khunjuzwa Kekana informed the committee that they are committed to assisting local municipalities to keep the water flowing to communities. To this end, they were drilling and equipping additional boreholes, and ensured the provisions of water tanks and water trucks to directly supply households with water. Accelerated ground water development projects are also being implemented to ensure residents are not without water. The Kouga dam is expected to run dry by the end of July.

The Eastern Cape CoGTA informed the committee that they were already actively supporting the district and local municipalities with the supply of water tankers and the development of electricity and water and sanitation master plans. A desalination water plant is also envisaged for the District. Municipalities were also aided to ensure proper community participation and consultative process including economic development projects.

Representatives from the various municipalities also asked the Committee and national CoGTA to assist them to negotiate reducing historical debt owed to Eskom.

Committee Chairperson, Faith Muthambi, welcomed the initiatives to ensure that the residents of the Sarah Baartman District Municipal area does not run out of water. She also applauded the improvements in the financial management and audit reports of the district and Koukamma, Blue Crane Route and Kouga local municipalities.