**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**NON ACHEIVEMENT OF TARGETS BY THE DEPARTMENT IN FOURTH QUARTER DISAPPOINTS THE COMMITTEE**

**Parliament, Friday, 3 September 2021** – The Portfolio Committee on Environment, Forestry and Fisheries, received briefings today from the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and Environment, Marine Living Resources Fund and the South African Weather Service on their fourth quarterly performance report for the 2020/21 financial year.

The committee heard that the 2020/21 financial year was challenging to every organ of the state. The department improved on areas that include intergovernmental relations, integrated planning, implementation, reporting and monitoring. While lockdown regulations were applied to curb the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, that did not constitute an excuse to stop the delivery of services to the people. The Chairperson of the Committee, Ms Faith Muthambi, said: “Departments needed to craft catch-up plans to meet their service delivery targets especially to the most deserving communities.”

The committee noted the poor performance of the department and its entities over the past three quarters, particularly its low achievement on set and funded targets. The committee raised its concerns that attaining 60 per cent is unacceptable when all the targets received 100% funding. The committee told the department and its entities to achieve all their set targets or be above 90%. The Minister of the department, Ms Barbara Creecy, assured the committee that the department will in future endeavour to achieve at least 80% of its set targets.

The committee also raised the issue of non-compliance with financial and accounting practices. It noted that the department relied on the assistance of the Auditor General to sort its financial statements every year and still did not receive a clean audit. One of the more concerning issues is contract management, which the department’s Chief Financial Officer (CFO) should foresee and plan ahead to find a service provider for the required goods and services. The committee heard that the former CFO has resigned in July and that interviews for the post were held and the appointment will be made soon.

The committee noted the undertaking of the Minister to improve performance and accountability. It heard that the revised general policy on the allocation of fishing rights has not been approved, due to delays in the Supply Chain Management processes and stoppages by the Government Printers in publication and gazetting of bids. Consequently, the readvertisement of bids for the appointment of service providers were delayed.

Of concern to the committee is that small-scale fishing rights have not been allocated. The department told the committee that it took a decision to apply to High Court to review and set aside the entire process of verification and recognition of small-scale fishers in the Western Cape. The committee will monitor the outcomes of the court process and should the court order be granted in favour of the department, the committee hopes that the new verification and recognition process, rights allocation and appeals process will be facilitated swiftly. The committee also noted that the department has set the target for the allocation of fishing rights for 31 December 2021.

Ms Muthambi enquired from the department on the implementation of the Communal Property Associations Act for the benefit of the communities living around the Kruger National Park.  The committee also enquired on the progress of the 4000 emerging wildlife entrepreneurs. The committee has given the department till next Friday to report on all questions posed to it by the committee.

Ms Muthambi said: “It is equally our responsibility as the committee to ensure that the department adheres to its commitments. We should thoroughly interrogate the sectoral matters and ensure that the activities of the department and its entities improve the lives of ordinary citizens.”

**ISSUED BY THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNICATION SERVICES ON BEHALF OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS, FORESTRY AND FISHERIES, MS FAITH MUTHAMBI.**