**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**SUPPORT FOR SMALL-SCALE AND EMERGING FARMERS SHOULD BE PRIORITISED**

**Parliament, Wednesday, 13 September 2022 –** The Department of Agriculture, Rural Development and Reform briefed the Standing Committee on Appropriations (SCOA) on fourth quarter underspending for the 2021/22 financial year. The committee expressed concerns that the department continued to underspend on its appropriated funds.

An amount of R1 124 billion still remained unspent, which it attributed to slow spending on support to farmers through the Presidential Stimulus Initiative, as well as other programmes. The department also highlighted that amongst other challenges the late submission and payment of invoices contributed to underspending.

The committee registered its disappointment with the department’s performance and its qualified audit outcomes and disclaimers. The committee emphasised that appropriated money should be accounted for, as it belongs to the people of South Africa.

The Chairperson of SCOA, Mr Sfiso Buthelezi, said: “This committee can reject the budget in its totality if we get the feeling that responsible people are not taking care of resources the way they’re supposed to.”

The committee was also concerned that the department attributed some of its underperformance to the participation of women, youth and people with disabilities. The committee pointed out that the department should have a gender-sensitive budget dedicated to women and youth.

The committee also called for support for rural and emerging farmers to be prioritised and further noted that they should be assisted with acquiring water-use licences. Other departments, such as Water and Sanitation, should be brought on board to assist further. The committee also noted the challenges faced by emerging and small-scale cannabis farmers, who are struggling to penetrate the market.

Mr Buthelezi concluded by saying that once public money has been allocated to the department, services should be delivered to people. Putting money into the economy should stimulate economic growth, which then assists small farmers and farmers in general and create employment opportunities in the agricultural sector.

**ISSUED BY THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNICATION SERVICES ON BEHALF OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS, MR SFISO BUTHELEZI.**

For media enquiries or interviews with the Chairperson, please contact the committee’s Media Officer:
Name: Jabulani Majozi (Mr)
Parliamentary Communication Services