**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**LACK OF DEPARTMENTAL CAPACITY UNDERMINES DAM SAFETY MANAGEMENT STANDARDS AND REQUIRES URGENT ACTION**

**Parliament, Wednesday, 2 November 2022 –**The Portfolio Committee on Water and Sanitation is concerned by the apparent lack of capacity at the Department of Water and Sanitation’s Dam Safety and Management division. This is having a direct impact on the department’s ability to enforce Chapter 12 of the National Water Act, Act 36 of 1998 (s117 – s123). It also threatens the safety of communities living downstream of dams and requires the department to act immediately.

The department’s backlog in evaluating 474 dam safety evaluations reports was a significant concern for the committee, as it implies that the department is uninformed about the safety conditions at these dams. It is therefore unable to recommend interventions and or conduct inspections to monitor compliance with recommendations. “The concern the committee has is that without clearing the backlog, the department cannot assure South Africans that dams within their vicinity are safe,” said Mr Robert Mashego, the Chairperson of the committee.

The committee acknowledges the department’s commitment to increase capacity in its dam safety office and within the engineering workforce at regional level. However, the committee urged the department to implement these plans urgently. The committee also resolved that the department must provide it with periodic updates on dam safety.

Meanwhile, the committee is also concerned by dam owners’ (both private and state) non-compliance with regulations requiring them to carry out dam safety evaluations. It is particularly concerning that municipalities are not complying with these regulations. The committee emphasised the need for the department to intensify enforcement action, including administrative, civil and criminal enforcement, to ensure compliance. The committee welcomes the collaboration between the department and the National Prosecuting Authority, which will increase the capacity of prosecutors to ensure successful convictions.

The committee supports the department’s initiative to increase the pool of approved professional persons (APP) and transform who comprises this pool. This is because the current regulations make it difficult for an engineer desiring this status to apply and be approved as such. Furthermore, as only six black Africans and three women currently have this status, the committee considers this a strategic move.

The department must also urgently carry out a study to determine which of the 337 mine residue dams in its database should be classified and registered as dams with a safety risk, taking into consideration the material properties of those deposits and other risk factors. “What we want is to ensure that the dams are safe, regardless of who owns the dam, to prevent the risk factors and loss of life. This can only be guaranteed if the department is adequately capacitated and enforces their own regulations,” Mr Mashego emphasised.

Regarding the Jagersfontein incident, the committee welcomed the institution of an investigation into the incident and will receive a report upon its conclusion.

**ISSUED BY THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNICATION SERVICES ON BEHALF OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON WATER AND SANITATION, MR ROBERT MASHEGO.**

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