

Department of Public Works identity crisis crippling service delivery

By **Samantha Graham MP** - DA Shadow Minister of Public Works and Infrastructure

Chairperson,

For years we have been misled into believing that the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure is not a service delivery department. That it is merely an enabling department to allow other departments to deliver services.

This is not true. The DPWI is engaged in service delivery, whether to client departments or directly to the public. But it continues to suffer from an identity crisis. It keeps having to reinvent itself to be all things to all people.

With each incarnation, a new entity has emerged with wide-ranging functions BUT often with no legislative mandate or definitive plan of action. The latest is Infrastructure South Africa. If we are to believe the hype, ISA is the panacea to all our economic woes as ISA will coordinate infrastructure-led growth throughout the country. The problem is we still have no idea what type of entity we are dealing with.

Last week, cabinet approved Dr Ramagkopa as the Head of ISA. What exactly is he heading? ISA doesn't have its own budget. Its own APP. It doesn't even have its own KPI's. We still don't really know who is responsible for oversight. Despite this, we are being asked to approve an amount of R137million for infrastructure development coordination that falls within the ambit of another Department – the Presidential Infrastructure Coordinating Committee.

ISA aside, there actually is an infrastructure entity within the DPWI. Enter the Independent Development Trust. The IDT was established primarily as the implementer of social infrastructure. Unfortunately, its track record has been inconsistent and the lack of support from both the DPWI and other Departments has ensured that the IDT has been unable to emerge as the leading implementing agency it was supposed to be.

A year ago, we learnt that the Minister had taken the decision to close down the IDT. We heard about it in the media. When Minister De Lille actually briefed us, she said she had taken the decision to disestablish the Trust by the end of the financial year. In fact, with imminent closure, we were not even presented with the APP for that year. She was determined to cease trading. Imagine our horror on discovering that she had no authority to take such a decision! It was the mandate of the IDT Board alone to do so. Fast forward a year. A new board has been established. APPs have been presented to us, and a budget of R115million has been bandied about as a means of supporting the IDT through this phase of rebirth.

The Construction Industry Development Board is tasked, in the main, with the transformation of the construction sector. They are responsible for the grading of organisations in various

disciplines, as well as the development of contractors – primarily, Black and/or women. While they are fulfilling their first mandate and compiling and maintaining a register of companies, their grading criteria are based solely on financial considerations. In simple terms, a contractor's grading is dependent on the value of the projects completed over a specified period. This grading methodology does not give any indication of the value for money provided by the contractor. Grading should be based on a range of criteria - including the completion of work within budget and within project timeframes. Objective measurement of quality of work should also be incorporated. It is not.

Another conundrum with the cidb is the lack of genuine development and upskilling of SMMEs. While there are development programmes, there is little understanding of the actual challenges faced by SMMEs. With the proposed amendment of the cidb Act, more attention must be paid to addressing the real issues hindering transformation.

Under the Council for the Built Environment, there is an Engineering Council. It is mandatory that any individual who is working in the engineering profession be registered with this Council. In other words, this body has the details of every engineer practicing in South Africa. It is beyond comprehension that out of that entire database, Minister Sisulu was unable to find 24 engineers to work on her water infrastructure programme and was then forced to bring in engineers from Cuba at a cost of R64 million. Minister De Lille, why is a Council under an entity in your Department enforcing mandatory registration but not fighting for its members? Why aren't you?

No discussion of the state of the DPWI would be complete without mentioning the Beitbridge Washing Line debacle. More than a year later, NOT ONE PERSON has been held accountable. The two companies involved continue to trade with the Department, and taxpayers are still out of pocket to the tune of R37 million. The fence is now in such a state of total disrepair that the Minister has determined that spending money to repair it would be wasteful expenditure. Consequence management flows beautifully off the tongue. It sounds impressive. Minister, we are still waiting to see what it actually encompasses.

The Portfolio Committee is currently engaged in public hearings on the Expropriation Bill. We have visited 5 provinces and it is becoming increasingly evident that this Bill is being packaged as the answer to South Africa's land crisis. The misunderstanding by the public as to the purpose of the Expropriation Bill is not being corrected. In every Province, the call for expropriation of land without compensation and the ensuing expectation of the allocation of land to each person, is gathering momentum. But if this Bill is eventually enacted and there is no wholesale redistribution of land, people's expectations will be shattered.

Many have threatened bloodshed if they do not get their land back. The Minister, and the ANC government, are creating false expectations that are going to place this country in crisis. It might be an election year, but we need to act responsibly. Our citizens deserve to know the truth. The Expropriation Bill is about giving government the right to expropriate property. There is nothing in the Bill that provides an indication of what the expropriated property will be used

for, least of all that it is for land reform. False expectations on something as critical as land are extremely dangerous. Minister, the lies need to stop.

The allocation of the budget within this Department is like throwing darts blindfolded. There might be a lucky bullseye, but it will probably be a lot more hit and miss. We need this Department to determine its core mandate. We need human and financial resources to be utilized in delivering on that mandate.

Minister De Lille, as policy head, it is time to remove the blindfold, focus your aim and deliver a bullseye.