**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**FRIDAY, 14 MAY**

**MINI PLENARIES (VIRTUAL)**

**10:00 – 12:15**

1. **Vote 31: Employment and Labour
[Hon. SL Ngcobo]**

Honourable Chairperson,

This year is one of the most challenging years for employment and labour, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Our youth are affected more than anyone else. As we speak today, more than 55% of our youth are unemployed. Companies are either retrenching employees or not taking on any new employees at all. This concerns us.

The unemployment rate can only be addressed if the Department ensures that employees are protected from employers who may want to abuse circumstances created by the Covid-19 pandemic. We also need solutions to ensure that the youth who are unemployed get assistance in seeking jobs. This will require the Department to think outside the box. There is a need for innovative solutions because the unemployment crisis is bigger than ever before, and it is trapping our youth in poverty.

The Government should consider relaxing the tax burden on employers who establish and contribute to medical aid and provident and pension fund schemes for their employees. In this challenging economy, we believe that the Government must extend more tax benefits to companies that provide training to their workers and to companies that hire youth in these challenging times.

Given the current economic challenges, support for unions should be increased to boost their capacity to protect workers. In this regard, we urge support for the CCMA, to ensure that companies that try to abuse their employees through the Covid-19 situation are brought to book.

It is concerning that the Government wants to downplay other causes of youth unemployment, such as the issue of foreign nationals who compete with our youth for jobs. At times, it appears that some companies hire more foreign nationals than South Africans because they do not want to comply with basic conditions of labour.

We must take steps to protect our youth. Labour laws must be enforced to make it expensive for these companies to overlook our youth. We appreciate that the Budget provides for compliance inspections and that 90% of companies that are not compliant will be given notices and dealt with according to our laws.

We also welcome the Budget provision for increased awareness of employment laws through advocacy sessions. All these initiatives must protect vulnerable employees, increase safety and ensure fairness in the workplace. The workplace must be regulated for the benefit of workers. For this to materialise, there is a need for strategic leadership, management and support in the Department, in particular, and in Government, in general.

Based on the importance of this Department in the protection of millions of employees throughout the country, the IFP supports this Budget.

Hon Ngcobo, MP

1. **Vote 32: Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment
[Hon. N Singh]**

**BUDGET VOTE 32 OF THE DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY, FISHERIES AND ENVIRONMENT (DFFE), DATED 11 MAY 2021.**

Honourable Chairperson,

The Right to an Environment, as ensconced in Section 24 of the Bill of Rights in our Constitution, guarantees not only a healthy environment to each and every individual but goes further, and mandates the state to ensure that such compliance occurs.

This Department is at the coalface of balancing the sustainable use of the environmental resources currently available, in a manner which does not render them finite and irreplaceable.

Hon. Minister, you shoulder the unenviable task of ensuring that environmental resources are utilised within the parameters of a sustainable development model.

This is a continuing battle, which is currently being waged upon many environmental and biodiversity fronts, and as the IFP, we wish to highlight the following issues for urgent attention and corrective action:

**Single-use plastic pollution** in our environment, and particularly our marine environment, remains one of the most concerning and detrimental pollutants, which, if not decisively addressed, will continue to indiscriminately kill marine animals and sea birds, and contaminate our seafood resources. In addition, they place unnecessary strain on our waste management systems. Their production, primarily from fossil fuels, contributes to global warming and climate change. In our opinion, single-use plastics should be immediately banned, Hon. Minister.

On 2 May 2021, Hon. Minister, you released the **High Level Panel** Report on the management, breeding, hunting, trade and handling of elephant, lion, leopard and rhinoceros, following the parliamentary hosting - in August of 2018 - of a Colloquium on Captive Lion Breeding and Hunting, which included the extremely controversial lion bone trade. The Report and recommendations do indeed herald a new dawn for our wildlife, where we move to a position that incorporates the de-commodification of iconic African species, such as the African Lion, and in which the Report states, quite categorically, in respect of our treatment of lions: that the cruelty, barbarism and abhorrent exploitation of them must end now. It further admits that these practices have indeed been a dark stain on the ethics of our democracy and a roadblock to our tourism reputation. Hon. Minister, it is our hope that you move swiftly with both legislation and regulation in this regard, and the IFP will most certainly be supporting the Report and its recommendations when it comes before Parliament.

**Wildlife Crime and Enforcement in South Africa** remains our Achilles heel in conservation efforts, where perpetrators of such crimes are all too often dealt with far too lightly, if at all. Often, once convicted, they are simply released with a small fine or slap on the wrist. The punishment certainly does not fit the crime, which *in toto,* leads to the decimation of keystone species in South Africa. The IFP therefore reiterates its calls for the establishment of specialist wildlife prosecutorial courts, with competent judicial officials, backed by unambiguous and stringent legislation and criminal sanction for wildlife-related crimes. In certain instances, we have sound legislation and regulation but there is just not sufficient enforcement.

If we look specifically at the Report, concerns must be noted regarding how the Department intends dealing with its decrease in budget, yet still achieving the targets it sets for itself. Minister Creecy stated last week that she expects nothing less than 80% achievement of targets from her officials. Minister, how do you intend achieving such targets with a zero budget allocation to the *Green Fund*? How would this assist the development of our green economy?

Regulatory certainty should also be prioritised - especially with regard to small-scale fishers. These people depend on fishing for subsistence and livelihoods and as such, should not be the victims of ineffective and ambiguous bureaucracy.

Chairperson, with regards the regulations at the Aliwal Shoal, which is a protected area, I trust you have received a report from the official that was sent down to have meetings, and conduct *in loco* inspections on that site. It will be evident from your report that some of the restrictions imposed on line fishermen in the area clearly illustrate ulterior motives by those who hide behind what is called Clansthal Conservancy. Minister, you should not allow past privileges to hamper the future of citizens in a democratic South Africa.

In summation, the IFP supports the Budget Vote and looks forward to continuing to work together with the Department in the achievement of its goals and targets.

I thank you.

Hon. Narend Singh, MP

1. **Vote 14: Statistics South Africa
[Hon. Inkosi Cebekhulu]**

Budget Vote 14: Statistics South Africa

Honourable Speaker/Chairperson

The IFP acknowledges the crucial role played by Statistics South Africa. The agency has made immense contributions over the years in the generation of statistics that have informed decisions in the running of the country’s economy, and has executed its mandate commendably in post-apartheid South Africa. As the custodian of the country’s statistics, Statistics South Africa has supported the country’s development agenda by providing the much-needed statistics required to measure progress in the different Ministries and Departments.

The IFP notes with concern the budget cuts that have been experienced at Statistics South Africa since 2015/16, which have created a human resource challenge, as key positions remained unfilled. These budget cuts have also affected the conduct of some of the key surveys at the agency, with concerns that this might have threatened the operational ability of the agency. We support budget cuts given that they have no effect on the operational ability of Statistics South Africa. We are of the view that funding should be made available to fill in key vacancies to ensure that the quality of statistics produced is not compromised.

We are in support of a fourth Population Census for the country. The IFP has a high regard for up-to-date statistics, and we understand that a new Population Census will provide the much-needed data for policy-making and planning.  Existing surveys in the country used in the analysis of key indicators, such as poverty and inequality, currently are using sampling frames that were drawn from the 2011 Population Census Master Frames. We need a new Census to update this, to enable the measurement of key indicators more accurately.  This Population Census also marks a new era in the history of the organisation, using computer-based data collection methods for the first time, indicating that we are embracing technology in the way we collect data.

Despite this, the IFP wishes to express its concern over the budget needed for this Census, given the country’s weak performance in other Departments, and the effect of Covid-19 on the economy. Secondly, we are concerned about the scheduled dates for the 2021 Population Census, which is expected to commence in October 2021. In anticipation of a third wave of Covid-19, the door-to-door data collection exercises of the Census may place some individuals at risk of contracting the Covid-19 virus. There is therefore a need for the procurement of adequate Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs) to ensure that this Census does not jeopardise our efforts in the fight against Covid-19. However, we have witnessed how procurement policies in the country have provided opportunities for corruption. We therefore request improvements to the country’s procurement legislation and a clear justification of all budgets in this regard.

The IFP supports the Budget Vote.