

Ice station claims are all about disputed invoices

As the department of public works, we welcome public and media scrutiny of our projects and finances.

However, in “Contract threat to SA Antarctic team” (May 12), the journalist was premature in accusing public works of placing the lives of South African scientists at risk without receiving input from the department.

The department has put in place a facilities management plan to safeguard the equipment referred to in the article.

The contractor, Nolitha, was presumptuous in claiming that only it was qualified to undertake this work. The original refurbishment contract went on open tender, a process in which other companies were deemed qualified to bid. The department built and maintained the original Antarctic bases and will implement the facilities management plan.

The article is an attempt by the contractor and its lawyers to put pressure on the department to pay invoices that are disputed.

The contract to refurbish SA’s Antarctic base began in 2015. All valid invoices from the contractor from that time have been honoured. However, by the end of 2018 the work was running into major extensions of scope and price. In the circumstances, the department sent a team of engineers to the Antarctic to verify the work done.

Discrepancies were found between the claims made in invoices and work done. The two findings were made available to the contractor on April 28 with the request that it respond with an explanation and

supporting documents by May 3. No response has been received.

It would be irresponsible for the department to pay invoices that are disputed. To do so would amount to financial misconduct in terms of National Treasury prescripts.

Another misleading allegation in the article is that service providers, particularly BEE companies, are suffering because of bureaucratic delays. Nothing is further from the truth. Ninety-five percent of valid invoices in March were paid within 30 days.

Thami Mali, spokesperson, department of public works