

AG report flags RAL for spending

Nelie Erasmus

POLOKWANE - The Auditor General's report for 2017/18 flagged the Roads Agency in Limpopo (RAL) as the third highest entity in respect of irregular expenditure amounting to R270 million, and stated that the entity has over-committed its allocation for the next three years.

This is of concern, said the DA's Katlego Phala, a Member of Legislature.

Phala said in a press release that RAL is over-committed by an amount of R798 million for the current financial year, R785 million for the 2020/21 financial year and R2,9 million of the 2021/22 financial year.

The party has tabled a motion in the Legislature on Tuesday (yesterday) to debate the efficacy and reliability of the agency.

In terms of Section 25 of the RAL Act, RAL is responsible for performing the strategic planning, design, construction, operation, management, control maintenance and rehabilitation of provincial roads for the province.

"RAL is failing dismally at this mandate," said Phala.

"RAL is governed by a Board of Directors who have failed to appear in front of the portfolio committee for the past two weeks and the MEC for Public Works, Roads and Infrastructure, Monica Mochadi, is yet to meet the full component of the board since she took office."

Phala accused the board of being "uncooperative" and said they seemed to be "disengaged with RAL's work".

Manyatela Maropeng, Head of Communications at RAL, said in response that the media statement issued by the DA contains several allegations.

He said he was not sure how the DA evaluated the efficacy, reliability and the capability of RAL to deliver its mandate, but confirmed that the agency was ready and available to provide any record reporting on its performance since the current board has been appointed.

He said the annual reports and newsletter are available on their website for perusal.

He said a first meeting of the portfolio

committee was called on 2 August and could not take place as the Chairperson of the Board, MEC, HOD of the department were requested to an urgent meeting by the premier and it was postponed at his request.

RAL learned about the seating of the portfolio committee on 6 August when the meeting was already in progress, and had not received any invite prior, he said.

The agency's management was summoned to attend and then subsequently, due to the absence of the Chairperson of RAL, was instructed to leave the meeting.

He said it was unfortunate that insufficient notice of the meeting was given, and that the chairperson had prior commitments.

Manyatela said it is inaccurate that the MEC has not met with the Board of Directors.

"On 23 July the MEC, HOD and officials in the employ of Public Works, Roads and Infrastructure met with the chairperson, interim CEO, company secretary and general manager: operations. We can also confirm, with absolute certainty, that the MEC, HOD, chief of staff and chief directors: professional services were in attendance at the board meeting held on 30 July 2019. We are willing to prove this with records."

Phala also stated other issues of concern at RAL according to the DA, regarding their performance, vacancy rate, and outstanding litigation matters to the amount of R163,923 million and the fact that only a small percentage of Limpopo's road network is paved after 25 years of democracy.

Manyatela said the DA's allegations do not take into account the projects and kilometres which will be completed in the current financial year.

A moratorium on the filling of vacancies meant that Provincial Treasury approved positions and the approved positions are filled, he said.

"Litigation is a matter for the court which we don't have control over."

Manyatela said RAL can only deliver roads within the available means and has gone out of its way to secure a considerable number of partnerships to augment the available budget.

The 2019/20 budget assumes a midterm adjustment of R400 million based on what happened in the past two years, he said: "The midterm adjustment is not factored in the next two years' projections".

The President, Cyril Ramaphosa, through the Government Gazette of 20 April 2018, directed an investigation by the Special Investigations Unit (SIU) into the agency's procurement of, or contracting of goods, works or services, and payments made in respect thereof.

A list of 27 contractors, in contracts mostly closed in 2015 and 2016, were included.

The former CEO, Maselaganyane Matji was appointed on 31 March 2015 to 29 February 2020, but tendered his resignation in January 2018. He was to work his notice up to 31 March this year and Gabriel Maluleke was appointed as interim CEO from 1 April until a CEO has been appointed.

Matji in his term managed to obtain close to half a billion Rand from the private sector (mostly mining) partners to assist the agency in doing their job.

nelie@nmgroup.co.za



**Former RAL CEO
Maselaganyane Matji.**