

■ COUNCIL BILLS

Debt mountain for government

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NATIONAL and provincial governments owe the country's municipalities a massive R5.7 billion for rates and other services.

A breakdown in figures showed the debt owed by national departments stood at R3.1 billion while all nine provinces owed municipalities R2.6bn.

The amounts owed have prompted Public Works and Infrastructure Minister Patricia de Lille to institute an initiative to settle all the government debt owed to municipalities.

De Lille revealed this in a written response to parliamentary questions from DA MP Patricia Kopane, who had asked whether her own department or any entity reporting to her owed any unpaid rates and services to municipalities.

She also quizzed De Lille about when the outstanding amounts would be settled.

In her response, De Lille said that her department's chief financial officer was spearheading the project to settle government debt to municipalities.

"(The CFO's) office developed a project plan to reconcile outstanding government debt for municipal service billed, agree with municipalities for settlement or recovery of the outstanding amount and obtain a sign-off and verification of accounts (as well as) provide clear recommendations to avoid a repetition of these issues.

"There are 135 municipalities of the 256 municipalities that are (reportedly) owed (money). The department is in the process of verifying the debt for all 256 municipalities," she said.

De Lille, however, said the debt amount municipalities claimed were unreliable and incorrect. She named two municipalities which she said disclosed a lump sum debt which was drastically reduced upon verification, and another failed to provide supporting documents to back its claim for its purported debt.

She said the department was resolute in its commitment to settle all verified debts within 30 days of receipt of invoices and sign-offs.

Owing the most is the Free State, with a debt of R629m, followed by Northern Cape at R575m and Limpopo at R422m. The Eastern Cape is said to owe R395m, Gauteng R313m, the North West R151m and Mpumalanga R100m.

Owing the least are the Western Cape (R21m) and KZN (R48m).



MINISTER of Public Works Patricia de Lille. | PHANDO JIKELO African News Agency (ANA)