

SECURITY ISSUES

Beitbridge fence 'a sham'

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THE Department of Public Works and Infrastructure has come under fire from the Standing Committee on Public Accounts (Scopa) over plans to repair the Beitbridge border fence.

MPs warned yesterday that it would be a waste of money to fix the fence and called on the department to put up a new fence to secure the country's border.

The department has been facing questions since the fence was installed a few months ago at a cost of R37 million, but it has since collapsed.

Scopa chairperson Mkhuleko Hlengwa said the fence was a "sham" as the border remained porous.

"Minister, you get the anxiety of members. We can't repair that fence. It was clear that the entire fence was a sham. It begs the question, what are you repairing? The entire fence must be stripped. We are told this fence is sub-standard. How much are you spending?" asked Hlengwa.

Minister of Public Works and Infrastructure Patricia de Lille said she shared the concerns of the committee.

She said her department was now part of the criminal justice cluster tasked with securing borders.

"I certainly share the anxiety of the committee. I shared with the department that I don't share the proposal to replace (the fence). As we are reporting

to the committee today, we are now part of the criminal justice cluster that deals with the security issues.

"I had an engagement with the Minister of Defence. Any repair at Beitbridge will not be decided by the Department of Public Works alone; the Department of Defence is a supporting department. These are ongoing consultations," said De Lille.

She said she would also hold talks with the Minister of Home Affairs, Aaron Motsoaledi, on the role of her department in relation to the Border Management Authority (BMA).

The new agency will take over the manning of the country's borders, and is made up of about nine departments.

The Department of Home Affairs told the portfolio committee last week that it would soon appoint a person to head the BMA.

ANC, DA and EFF MPs slammed the poor quality of the fence at Beitbridge, and plans to replace it.

They said it would be a waste of money to replace it and they wanted the Department of Public Works to put up a solid structure.

The Department of Public Works told Scopa that it would take up to four years to put up a solid border security fence because it was part of a long-term solution to secure the country's borders.

They would be engaging with different departments on the matter.