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Title: KZN govt departments hamper SIU operations

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R87 MILLION OWED

KZN govt departments hamper SIU operations

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KwaZulu-Natal Government departments and municipalities owe the Special Investigations Unit (SIU) R85.7 million.

The SIU in KZN invoiced departments and municipalities for R236m for services rendered. The SIU-KZN briefed the Standing Committee on Public Accounts (Scopa) at the KZN Legislature yesterday on its provincial success stories for 2024/2025 and also requested Scopa to assist in motivating departments to pay up.

Ashish Gosai, the provincial head of SIU, stated that the presentation before Scopa aimed to provide a background on the role the SIU plays within the system and to provide an update on provincial investigations. Gosai said the SIU also wanted to explore how Scopa can assist the SIU and vice versa in carrying out their respective mandates.

"We are an investigative body that seeks to recover money lost to the state while ensuring that the weaknesses in the system are identified and enhanced," he said.

Provincial successes for the year:

- ◆ R35.8m cash/or assets to be recovered
- ◆ R886m potential loss prevented
- ◆ R40m cash/or assets recovered.
- ◆ R499m contracts set aside or deemed invalid
- ◆ R125m value of matters in respect of which evidence was referred for the institution or defense/ opposition of civil proceedings
- ◆ 35 referrals made for disciplinary action against officials or executives
- ◆ 54 matters were sent to the relevant prosecuting authority.

Among the pending investigations and final report under review was the Department of Health medico-legal claims from 2022, where the SIU prevented a loss of R2.7 billion.

The SIU investigated unlawful improper conduct by claimants or applicants or their agents in this institution of civil action or civil application proceedings for relief against the institutions in respect of medical negligence claims in a fraudulent manner.

They have made one systematic recommendation, three disciplinary referrals, nine administrative referrals and seven National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) referrals.

The SIU is also investigating eThekweni Municipality's procurement of or contracting for security services and VIP protection services between 1 January 2004 and 22 November 2024. The SIU's investigation seeks to determine if the process was conducted fairly and transparently, and whether service providers delivered as contracted.

They are also investigating maladministration in the eThekweni Ablution

Blocks-IN SITU Upgrade-Infrastructure Sanitation

Gosai, while speaking about the SIU funding model, asked how they could work together with SCOPA in achieving their mandate. He explained that the SIU total operational budget is made up of government grants (40%) and recovery of fees (60%), which is charged to the departments they investigate.

"The entities need to pay us. Without that payment, it affects our operational budget. In November 2022, there was a resolution passed by SCOPA where they directed departments to settle payments and reflect progress on these payments. Unfortunately, pursuant to that resolution, we did get several departments that started paying, but some ignore our pleas for payment," he told SCOPA.

Gosai said receiving the money was important because the SIU plays a larger role than just funding and conducting our investigations. Gosai said the SIU-KZN has also not received payment of R2m from Ithala Development Bank.

"Our investigations are at an advanced state. We are putting a preliminary report together. We are aware they have applied to the provincial treasury for an exemption," he said.

Some of the amounts owed are:

- ◆ eThekweni municipality reduced its amount owed from R21m to R965 000.
- ◆ Department of Health owes R15m.
- ◆ KZN Public Works owed R39m and has now reduced it to R22m.
- ◆ The KZN Department of Transport owed R38m, now reduced to R3m.

Gosai explained to Scopa that the SIU conducts lectures with several departments on integrity and anti-corruption, what to do, and how to identify issues when they arise.

"We find that it is important that we do this because prevention is better than cure. Educating officials on what they should be on the lookout for. We found that this assists us in an investigation, should an investigation ensue," he said.

Gosai said the SIU role is much more than investigation and is now branching out into the education aspect. "We advise departments when they require guidance. That is the route we are now going. We are trying to provide this holistic service to the province," he added.

Tim Brauteseth, Scopa chairperson, said they would write to the departments to request details on why they have outstanding amounts with SIU.

Celiwe Madlopha, ANC Deputy chief whip and MPL, described SIU KZN as partners to Scopa.

She said they would look at the report closely and hold the departments accountable.