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STAGGERING

Taxpayers cough up R65m on vacant properties

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TAXPAYERS have forked out a staggering R65 million in rates and services for more than 1 000 vacant properties owned by the state, according to Public Works and Infrastructure Minister Dean Macpherson.

Macpherson revealed the figure when he was responding in writing to parliamentary questions from EFF MP Kenneth Montwedi.

He said as of January, there were 1 259 state-owned vacant lands, 207 unoccupied houses and 830 abandoned farms that remain unallocated for utilisation.

Macpherson said the government could be missing out R83m by not leasing out the properties.

"The estimated potential revenue lost in 2024-2025 financial year is R83m based on the Property Management Information System calculations in terms of holding costs," he said, when asked the amount lost in revenue by the government.

Macpherson said his department has already spent R65m in rates and taxes as of 31 January 2025. Macpherson would not say when these state-owned vacant land and houses would be allocated or disposed of.

"Due to vacant properties being at risk of invasion should their details be made public, I am open to discussing this matter further with the Member in my office in Cape Town."

However, Macpherson said there were measures put in place to deal with the allocation of the properties and the potential loss in revenue.

"The department has initiated a programme of letting out unutilised state-owned properties to interested investors. Currently, the department has placed 31 properties to the open market inviting interested investors to submit proposals on optimal utilisation and revenue generation," he said.

Macpherson also said the department will further release an estimated 30 properties for long term leasing in the 2025-26 financial year. Interested investors will be invited to submit proposals on development or redevelopment of such properties.

He said there will be readvertising of about 600 state-owned properties for general letting-out as well as the release of agricultural farms that are not earmarked for the Department of Agriculture, Rural Development and Land Reform for long term leasing.

There will also be permanent disposal of non-core residential properties, Macpherson said.

In a separate response to questions posed by Rise Mzansi MP Makashule Gana, Macpherson said his department has not expropriated any land over the last decade.

He said the department was however supporting Eskom with expropriation of around 27 properties (servitudes) for the purposes of overhead power lines for increased energy capacity for the country.