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EMBARRASSING DELAYS: The partially completed Sarah Baartman Centre of Remembrance in Hankey. Picture: EUGENE COETZEE

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Herald Reporter

Projects such as the long-stalled Sarah Baartman Centre of Remembrance could soon be up and running after a special unit was launched to fast-track 30 delayed construction projects across SA.

Spearheaded by public works and infrastructure minister Dean Macpherson, the strategic and special delivery unit (SSDU) will be made up of experts from within the department and will report directly to the minister biweekly.

The unit is expected to speed up progress on key infrastructure projects which have been held back by years of delays, mismanagement and contractor failures.

Macpherson said the Sarah Baartman centre stood as a symbol of government failure after more than a decade of incomplete work.

Construction of the centre, a world heritage legacy project, began in Hankey in August 2014 at a projected cost of R164m and was meant to be completed in 30 months.

However, it has been hampered by numerous delays, contractual disputes and cost overruns.

The centre is being constructed to commemorate Sarah Baartman, a Khoi woman from the Gamtoos Valley region who was tragically exhibited in Europe during the 19th century.

"Following a visit to the Sarah Baartman Centre of Remembrance in Hankey, Eastern Cape, on Thursday, Macpherson announced 30 priority projects — including

the remembrance centre — to be completed by the newly launched SSDU within the department," the department said in a statement.

"The unit, which will be led by the deputy director-general for construction project management and will include experts from across the department, will provide the minister with fortnightly progress reports to ensure projects are completed as soon as possible."

Macpherson said the SSDU was one of the concrete steps being taken after his rejection

of a joint report by the department and the department of sports, arts and culture in September 2024.

"With the SSDU now in charge of the project, a new contractor is expected to be appointed by [May], and the centre will finally be completed," he said.

"The centre is a prime example of how the department has failed in its core function of delivering social infrastructure to communities.

"Over a decade, three contractors have attempted to

complete the centre, yet it remains wholly incomplete.

"This culture of inefficiency within the department is one we have begun to change and I have no doubt that the measures announced today [yesterday] will ensure the centre's completion as soon as possible."

"The life of Sarah Baartman remains an important reminder of our painful past, and it is imperative that we honour

her memory with the dignity and respect she deserves.

"It is regrettable that, thus far, the work on the centre has failed to achieve this, and it has instead become a financial burden on taxpayers. This is why urgent action is required to turn the situation around."

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