

COMMITTEE REPORT OF THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON PREMIER'S OFFICE; FINANCE; ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM:

OVERSIGHT VISIT HELD IN THE DR JS MOROKA LOCAL MUNICIPALITY, NKANGALA DISTRICT, 01 AUGUST 2019 – MDALA NATURE RESERVE (MTPA)

1. INTRODUCTION

Section 118 (1) (a) and (b) (i) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa empowers a provincial legislature to facilitate public access to and involvement in its oversight processes. In addition, sections 114 and 133 of the Constitution, read together with rules 218 and 131 of the Rules and Orders of the Mpumalanga Provincial Legislature (the Rules) directs the Legislature to hold the Executive accountable for the exercising of powers and performance of functions.

In carrying out its constitutional oversight and public participation mandate, the **Portfolio Committee on Premier's Office; Finance; Economic Development and Tourism** (the Committee) conducted oversight visits in the Dr JS Moroka Local Municipality (the municipality) on 01 August 2019.

This report reflects the issues that emanated from the oversight activities during the said date, which will need further intervention of the **Department of Economic Development and Tourism** (DEDT) and its parastatal **Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency** (MTPA).

2. PURPOSE OF THE OVERSIGHT ACTIVITIES

The Committee assessed progress on projects that are assisted by the Department of Economic Development and Tourism (DEDT) and Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency (MTPA). The Committee wanted to ensure that the DEDT's and entity's delivery of core mandated services is fast tracked.

3. METHOD OF WORK

As per the Legislature programme, the Economic Cluster had oversight visits planned for the period 01 August 2019 at the Dr JS Moroka Local Municipality. The Committee informed the department and entity about the oversight visits to be conducted and the purpose thereof.

- On 01 August 2019, the Committee conducted the oversight visit at the Mdala Nature Reserve in the Dr JS Moroka Local Municipality.

4. OBSERVATIONS AND COMMENTS

The Committee observed the following:

- The Mdala Nature Reserve is situated in the Dr JS Moroka Municipality Mdala Nature Reserve is located in the Mpumalanga Province, approximately 65 km north of Bronkhorstspuit.
- Mdala Nature Reserve covers approximately 8 600 hectares. The reserve's mountains and plains are covered with savannah vegetation and game, which creates an exciting bushveld atmosphere.
- Mdala Nature Reserve has two (2) veld types that occurs at the reserve, namely Mixed Bushveld and Mixed Sourish Bushveld (Acocks, 1975). These veld types are characterized by a range of variations and transitions, leading to a very heterogenic veld type.
- Since the inception of the reserve in 1988 several game species were introduced. i.e. Giraffe; Kudu; Eland; Zebra; Waterbuck; Warthog; Ostrich; Gemsbok; Red hartebeest; Blue wildebeest; Impala, Bushbuck and Duiker.
- The surrounding landowners on the southern and western borders are mainly farming with livestock and/or game. To the north and east, some urban development are close to the boundary, and livestock is kept on a communal grazing basis.
- Mdala Nature Reserve has land claimants. 36.7% of the reserve was claimed by Mmahlabane trust and 5.6% claimed by Moutse Community Property Association (CPA).
- The land was restituted to the rightful owners. Settlement and Co-Management Agreement was signed on the 27th of February 2010.

- Successful establishment of CMC created a good platform for sharing on management issues and also enhanced good working relationship with land claimants.
- The relationship between claimants and MTPA is good such that the reserve management and other MTPA official hold Co-management Committee meetings with the land owners on quarterly basis.
- In 2014 Mdala and Mkhombo nature reserves received Environmental Protection Infrastructure Program (EPIP) funding from the National Department of Environmental Affairs amounting to R23 000 000,00 to renovate and build new infrastructure in the reserves.
- A private implementer by the name of Marule and Associates failed to commence with the project until the project was put on hold and the National Department of Environmental Affairs shifted the implementation responsibility to MTPA.
- The reserve manager indicated during the fire season around April-July each year the reserve usually burn the firebreaks along the boundaries of the reserve to prevent accidental fires from outside the reserve from entering the reserve.
- The reserve manager, Mr Giyane reported that the Reserve Workshop and Main Offices were burnt by lightning since they were roofed by thatch and cannot be extinguished.
- The main offices were burnt in 2015 and an amount of R 2 000 000, 00 was received from the insurance company in 2016 to rebuild the offices, however the money is still with the entity (MTPA).
- The reserve manager indicated that all roads in the reserve are gravel roads and need regular maintenance, tourist roads, management roads and fence line roads. The reserve manager indicated that the reserve rely on the Municipality as well as the Department of Public Works Road and Transport for grading of the roads as they are usually damaged after heavy rains.
- The reserve manager indicated that community members vandalises the fence to steal fire wood.
- The vacancy rate is 17%. The reserve has a total of thirty seven permanent employees and there is also a challenge of aging staff members as there is no employee under the age of 50 years.
- The reserve is not self-sustainable and there has been a decline on revenue generation since 2017/18 financial year to date.

5. INTERACTION WITH THE NATURE RESERVE MANAGEMENT

5.1. MDALA NATURE RESERVE

Mr Jiyane, the Reserve Manager at the Mdala Nature Reserve gave an overview on the Reserve.

Mdala Nature Reserve has land claimants. Approximately 36.7% of the reserve was claimed by Mmahlabane trust and 5.6% claimed by Moutse Community Property Association (CPA). The land was restituted to the rightful owners. Settlement and Co-Management Agreement was signed on 27 of February 2010. Successful establishment of CMC created a good platform for sharing on management issues and also enhanced good working relationship with land claimants. The relationship between claimants and MTPA is good such that the reserve management and other MTPA official hold Co-management Committee meetings with the land owners on quarterly basis.

During the implementation of the maintenance projects three (3) local contractors were appointed. One contractor has since completed the project of renovating the Mkhohwane gate and the other contractor is still onsite for the renovation of Vaal bank Picket. The third contractor could not proceed with the project due to fire that destroyed the building. The reserve manager reported that ten (10) temporary work opportunities were created with a total budget of R500 000, 00 allocated for Mdala Nature Reserve for infrastructure upgrades.

According to the reserve Manager, the infrastructure on the reserve consists of the Game fence: the reserve is 100% fenced with a 2.4 meters high game fence covering an area of 64 kilometres; roads are divided into management roads and tourist route. The management routes covers an area of 220 kilometres whilst tourist routes covers a total area of 32 kilometres. The reserve manager further indicated that the reserve consists of the following buildings:

- 2 x entrance gates;
- Store room and workshop;
- 4 x staff houses;
- 1 x Mdala Education centre;
- 2 x Pickets and
- 1 x tourists lodge (Mkhohwane and 7 x guest houses).

The reserve Manager indicated that the reserve has thirteen (13) Field Rangers and four (4) Anti-poaching unit staff members who are responsible for security, furthermore, a private security company employed two (2) Security Guards to control access at the two (2) entrance gates.

The Mdala nature reserve reported the following achievements namely:

- Completed alien invasive plants mapping for control purpose.
- Created three (3) work opportunities under the EPWP for twelve months.
- Completed the renovation of the Mkholwane entrance gate.
- Provided training to all field rangers and reserve management on Environmental Management Inspectorate.

The reserve manager indicate that an integrated management plan was in place with a Tourism Master plan and an integrated feasibility study has been developed and he further indicated that the plan will ensure that tourism is expanded to an optimum level so that it increases revenue generation and job creation.

The reserve management indicated the following challenges:

- There is inadequate budget allocation.
- The filling of critical vacant position i.e. Foreman, Driver, Cashier and Store person.
- Unavailability of a proper office for the reserve.
- Game Poaching by neighbouring communities.
- Vandalism of fence at Vaalbank area.
- Inadequate infrastructure and tourism facilities upgrade and maintenance.
- Insufficient underground water supply.

MTPA indicated the following priority upgrades for 2019/20 in Mdala Nature Reserve:

- Repairs and renovation of swimming pool at Mkholwane Lodge.
- Upgrade and renovation of five (5) staff houses.
- Water provision to the office and chalets.
- Reconstruction of the office block and abattoir, which were burned down.

5.1.1 FINDINGS MADE BY THE COMMITTEE

After the interaction with the reserve management the Committee noted the following:

1. The reserve together with Mkhombo both received R 23 000 000, 00 for infrastructure upgrades; which was never used and is still with the Implementing Agent.
2. The Committee noted that there is lack of income generation in the Reserve,
3. R900 000 was received from the insurance company.
4. The reserve is not located on a prominent tourism route and is relatively isolated with no marketing strategy.
5. There are vacant positions and no youth employed by the reserve.
6. There is lack of Environmental Education in the community and other neighbouring villages.
7. There is lack of water within the reserve.
8. There are certain animals which were removed from the reserve.

5.1.2 RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY THE COMMITTEE

After the deliberations, the Committee resolved on the following:

1. The entity must follow up with DEA to ensure that they are appointed as the implementing agent and provide the Committee with a progress report.
2. The entity must inform the Committee on their plan to revive the reserve.
3. The entity must ensure that the monies received from the insurance company are used to reconstruct the burnt buildings.
4. The entity must develop a marketing strategy as well as a sustainable commercial/tourism strategy to increase revenue generation sources.
5. The entity must ensure that vacant positions are filled and consider appointing qualified young people.
6. The entity must assist the reserve to conduct more Environmental Awareness Programmes within the community as it is the entity's role to develop and implement environmental awareness and interpretation programs for the reserve.
7. The entity must liaise with the Municipality for the water to be supplied and payment terms should be agreed upon to help address the water challenge.
8. The entity must provide a detailed report to the committee regarding certain animals which have been removed.

The Committee moves that the House adopts the report with the above recommendations.

6. CONCLUSION

The Chairperson would like to take this opportunity to thank the Members of the Portfolio Committee for their active participation and constructive contributions during the oversight visits.

In addition, the Chairperson extends a word of appreciation to the senior management officials of DEDT and MTPA, the management of Mdala Nature Reserve, the Dr JS Moroka Local Municipality and all other stakeholders for their co-operation during the oversight work of the Committee.

The Chairperson would also like to thank the support staff for contributing to the production of this report.

Unless otherwise stated the Department of Economic Development and MTPA are required to investigate the observations and findings in this Committee report and implement all the House Resolutions. The report detailing progress in the implementation of all recommendations should be forwarded to the Committee by 30 September 2019 and thereafter on a quarterly basis.



**HON M LATCHMINARAIN (MPL),
CHAIRPERSON:
PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON
PREMIER'S OFFICE; FINANCE;
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM**

22.08.2019

DATE