

Audit to focus next on privately owned property

By [Linda Ensor](#)

13 Feb 2014

The government is to embark on the second phase of its land audit, aimed at identifying who owns the 79% of privately owned land in SA. The audit will include their nationality and their demographic profile.



Data from a comprehensive audit of all land in South Africa will be used to create a detailed property register of privately owned properties. Image: [Harcourts](#)

This process would also involve the modernisation of SA's property register - or cadastral - and transferring it to an electronic system.

The director-general of the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform, Mduduzi Shabane, told the National Council of Provinces' select committee on public services that the proposal to establish an electronic register of property would be presented to Parliament after the general election on 7 May.

The system would also be able to track changes in patterns of land ownership in future. The government has indicated it plans to revise the regime governing land ownership by foreign nationals.

The first phase of the audit - of state-owned properties - started in 2009 and had established that 14% of land was owned by the state and 4% of it was recently surveyed state land. Shabane and representatives of the Department of Public Works briefed the committee on the progress made in undertaking an audit of all state-owned land in the country, an ambitious project that Public Works Deputy Minister Jeremy Cronin said had not been concluded by many developed countries.

Who is the custodian?

A tricky aspect of the project was to determine which sphere of government was the custodian of the identified assets. It was often difficult to determine what properties were owned by departments and officials said this was not reflected in their annual financial statements.

According to the Constitution, departments were only obliged to report to the accountant-general about their properties individually, and it would require a strong inter-governmental relations framework to pull all this data together and ensure accountability.

In terms of the Constitution, The Department of Public Works cannot take control of buildings or land owned by other departments but with greater co-operative governance, the department may be able to create a consolidated, centralised database.

The proposed Land Commission Bill, which has been released for public comment and consultation, would help in achieving this.

The committee heard that the bill proposed to set up an institution to establish and maintain a database of all registered and unregistered state land. "This will resolve the possibility of unaccounted-for, immovable assets," an official said.

The bill would also create mechanisms for the adjudication of all land ownership disputes, compel disclosure of all immovable assets controlled by a government department and compel the disclosure of any immovable asset movements in the form of purchases or sales.

The government's desire to have a single database containing all state-owned assets would require accountability by departments and provincial governments.

Cronin told MPs that "significant progress" had been made in drawing up a register of all state-owned properties.

Ambitious targets had been set to complete the work, which was essential for the transformation of the society. "The investigation had in some cases unearthed a can of worms," Cronin said.

Source: Business Day via I-Net Bridge

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>