

Department of Agriculture 'fails to meet its own targets'

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The Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries failed to achieve 51% of its planned targets during the 2011-12 financial year although it spent 99% of its R4.9bn budget, according to auditor-general Terence Nombembe.

Mr Nombembe said in the department's latest annual report there was a 46% variance between planned and actual achievements that were not explained as required by Treasury regulations due to the limited review of the annual performance report by management.

The auditor-general's report said the department had only met 17% of its targets and this was a result of the lack of monitoring of the completeness of reporting documents by management.

Parliament's portfolio committee on agriculture, forestry and fishing is due to hold public hearings on the department's annual report on Tuesday. However, it is not yet known who will present the report. The department's director-general, Langa Zita, was suspended by Minister Tina Joemat-Pettersson in June for "administrative reasons".

Mr Zita's case is being handled by the Department of Public Service and Administration and he is not expected to resume his position in the agriculture department.

According to the auditor-general, the department had no human resource plan in place during the year, accounting in part for the 949 vacancies. In addition to not having a director-general, six of the department's nine deputy directors-general are only acting in those posts.

Mr Nombembe also found that the accounting officer (the director-general) did not take effective steps to prevent irregular, fruitless and wasteful expenditure.

Irregular expenditure amounted to R6.1m and fruitless and wasteful expenditure rounded off at R12.2m.

The Democratic Alliance's (DA's) agriculture, forestry and fisheries spokeswoman, Annette Steyn, said attempts made by the department's audit committee to meet the director-general to address governance concerns prior to his suspension, were unsuccessful.

"Attempts to meet the executive authority were also unsuccessful. This highlights the absence of leadership from the minister," she said.

It was clear she (the minister) was unfit to hold public office, Ms Steyn said.

The DA has laid three complaints against Ms Joemat-Pettersson with Public Protector Thuli Madonsela.

One complaint concerns wasteful expenditure on airline flights, a second is about the controversial fisheries protection tender worth R800m, and the third concerns Ms Joemat-Pettersson's behaviour as a member of the executive.

Source: Business Day

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