

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

**OVERSIGHT VISIT HELD IN THE NKOMAZI LOCAL MUNICIPALITY, EHLANZENI
DISTRICT, 04 AUGUST 2017 – MAHUSHE SHONGWE 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 Nkomazi Local Municipality (the municipality) on 04 August 2017.

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 03 – 04 August 2017 at the Nkomazi Local Municipality. The Committee informed the department and entity about the oversight visits to be conducted and the purpose thereof.

- On 04 August 2017, the Committee conducted the oversight visit at the Mahushe Shongwe Nature Reserve in the Nkomazi Local Municipality.

4. OBSERVATIONS AND COMMENTS

The Committee observed the following:

- The Mahushe Shongwe Nature Reserve is situated in the Nkomazi Municipality on the extreme South-Eastern part of Mpumalanga in a broad valley between the Lebombo Mountains in the East and the Great Escarpment in the West.
- Mahushe Shongwe Nature Reserve is a community owned reserve (Mzinti); the smallest Provincial nature reserve (1 139 ha) in Mpumalanga and the land is managed by the Matsamo tribal authority.
- The reserve was proclaimed as the Mahushe Shongwe Nature Reserve by Proclamation No 12 of the Provincial Gazette No 132 of 29 March 1996 by the MEC for Environmental Affairs, Mpumalanga.
- There are no land claims on Mahushe Shongwe Nature Reserve. It is a community reserve that was identified by the Mzinti Tribal Authority to utilise for the purpose of conservation and beneficiation it may bring.
- MTPA entered into a lease agreement with the Matsamo Tribal Authority. The agreement commenced in April 1996 and subject to the terms and conditions will terminate on 31 March 2046; however the current lease agreement is under review as a result of certain limitation clauses which in essence prevent maximizing benefits to the Mzinti communities caused by the previous regime.
- The entity indicated that the lease agreement under review is at an advance stage and it seeks to maximize landowner and community benefit.

- The Mawewe cattle project is managed by MTPA however; there are no game species only natural plants and animals are conserved in that land and local community utilizes it for livestock grazing.
- During the 2014/15 financial year, Mahushe Shongwe and Mawewe Cattle Game Project received Environmental Protection Infra-structure Program (EPIP) funding from the National Department of Environmental Affairs amounting to R10 000 000.00 for erection of a 7kilometre Game Proof fence, establishment of new ranger Picket and upgrading of Tourism Camp for community events.
- The reserve manager indicated that the R10 000 000.00 was spent on the Mawewe Cattle Game Project and all the deliverables were achieved. The only challenge with this particular project is that there is no adequate security hence local people are vandalizing the facilities more especially the fence.
- The state of the road is fair however; there is lack of security and no adequate signage.
- The reserve is not located on a prominent tourism route and is relatively isolated with no marketing strategy even at the Municipality level; as a result there is a lack of Environmental education.
- The reserve is fairly well developed, generates an income of R 52 415.00 p.a. with the potential to improve, once the Nthomeni camp is developed. The Game value is estimated at R 2 800 000.00.
- The total operational cost (2017/18 budget) to manage the reserve is R 4 500 000.00 (with COE of 90%).
- A total of R18 000 000.00 has been allocated for infrastructure and tourism development through Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA).
- The vacancy rate is 48%. Six (6) field ranger positions are filled out of a total of thirteen (13) positions (54% vacancy).
- The reserve is not self-sustainable and currently relies on funding.

5. INTERACTION WITH THE NATURE RESERVE MANAGEMENT

5.1. MAHUSHE SHONGWE NATURE RESERVE

Mr Doctor Mdluli: MTPA Programme Manager (DEDT) and Mr MJ Nkosi: Manager at the Mahushe Shongwe Nature Reserve gave an overview on the Reserve.

Mahushe Shongwe Nature Reserve is a community owned reserve and maintains good relations with local community structures and Traditional Leadership. A priority is given to local communities regarding employment and business opportunities and will benefit regarding income related to game hunting and sales.

According to the reserve Manager, the project forms part of the EPWP framework, i.e. creation of employment and skills upgrade. The Mahushe Shongwe community facility upgrade project was approved for planning in November 2014. The project business plan was approved and handed over to MTPA on the 11 October 2016. The implementation phase was effected on 21 December 2016, by the payment of the implementation fee for the construction phase.

MTPA further reported that the participants commenced with Induction, Environmental Awareness, Occupational Health and Safety, First Aid, SHE Representatives Training and Medical Fitness tests from the 6 to 23 March 2017. The contractor was then appointed on 1 June 2017. Mr Justus Mohlala (MTPA) and the MTPA CEO, Mr BJ Nobunga, later reported that the construction on site commenced on 12 June 2017, with the most crucial deliverables, which are the staff accommodations, which form part of the outcome 7 of the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA). The project is due for completion on 29 June 2018.

- **Seven deliverables of the eleven have commenced:**

1. Convert / Upgrade staff accommodation to office block and upgrade entrance gate
2. Convert / Upgrade office to staff accommodation
3. Upgrade environmental center
 - i. Excavation for foundations
 - ii. Steel fixing
4. Upgrade of picnic area
 - i. Clearing of site for swimming pool area
 - ii. Replacement of braai stands
5. Renovation of storeroom
 - i. Brickwork around cold room
6. Renovation of ablutions

- i. Removal of aprons
- 7. Renovation of staff accommodation
 - i. Replacement of Ceiling

The engineer on site briefed the Committee on the Non-Motorized Transport (NMT) Project while members of the Committee did site inspection. The Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) has approach MTPA for the introduction of a Non-Motorized Transport method (Bicycles and Tricycles), in two of the reserves, namely Mahushe Shongwe and Loskop Dam. Due to the favourable distance and terrain between the residential homes of the participants and the Nature Reserve, the project was found suitable for the pilot project of the NMT project.

According to the engineer, 120 participants are going to be provided with bicycles as a form of transport to and from work on a daily basis; the bicycle will also come with a helmet, reflector vest, combination lock and multi toolkit. Participants will be given a day of training to train them on how to be aware of other road users using the road.

The remaining 22 participants, amongst which, the disabled and physically unfit, will be provided a monthly transport allowance for the duration of the project. The bicycles were reported to be handed out in the month of August 2017.

The reserve management indicated the following challenges:

- There are no activities currently and as a result no revenue generation, due to the renovations.
- The small size of the reserve limits the potential for massive revenue generation.
- There have been poachers from Swaziland that entered the reserve through the fence; DEA has been requested to provide the reserve with sixteen (16) more environmental monitors (there are four – 4 currently), to identify poachers and for the protection of game.
- The day-visitors park only works during the festive season and trophy hunting that is done in winter only generates some revenue then.

5.1.1 FINDINGS MADE BY THE COMMITTEE

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

1. The reserve is not located on a prominent tourism route and is relatively isolated with no marketing strategy.
2. Infrastructure upgrades in the reserve has commenced.
3. There is lack of security in and around the reserve.
4. There is lack of Environmental education in the Mzinti community and other neighbouring villages.
5. There is no adequate signage that leads to the reserve.
6. The Committee noted that the mandate of the reserve is that of bio-diversity and conservation; however in the 2016/17 financial year the reserve generated only R52 415.00, while the cost of managing the reserve is estimated at R4 283 422.00 for the financial year in question.

5.1.2 RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY THE COMMITTEE

After the deliberations, the Committee resolved on the following:

1. The reserve must develop a marketing strategy as well as a sustainable commercial/tourism strategy to increase revenue generation sources.
2. The entity must monitor the infrastructure upgrades to ensure that the project is completed on time.
3. The entity must strengthen the security measures within the reserve as well as the Cattle Game Project.
4. The entity must assist the reserve to conduct more Environmental Awareness Programmes within the Mzinti community and ensure it implements the programme planned for September 2017, as it is the entity's role to develop and implement environmental awareness and interpretation programs for the reserve.
5. The entity must ensure that sufficient signage is put up and be prioritized in the 2017/18 financial year.
6. The entity must develop and submit a strategy to the Committee to optimize the reserves revenue generation, as the above ratio on finding 6 is surely not sustainable.

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 CEO of MTPA, Mr BJ Nobunga, senior management officials of DEDT and MTPA, the management of Mahushe Nature Reserve, the Nkomazi 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 20 September 2017 and thereafter on a quarterly basis.



**HON FV MLOMBO (MPL),
CHAIRPERSON:
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05-09-2017
DATE