

## **An overhaul of the department and its entities is needed to get rid of cadre deployment and corruption**

By Tsholofelo Bodlani - DA Deputy Shadow Minister of Telecommunications and Digital Services

### **DIGITAL MIGRATION**

On 29 March 2022 the minister addressed the committee and reassured the committee that the country's digital migration connections was on track. The minister stated that she had personally overseen the distribution process of 900 000 set top boxes. At that time the minister said a further 35- 000 set top boxes would still have to be distributed.

That said it would be remiss of us to not see how the ruling of the Johannesburg High Court on the e-TV and others vs Minister of Communications and Digital Technologies and others as a saving grace for the minister and her department. The deferment of the Analogue Switch Off date (ASO) from 31st March 2022 to 30 June 2022 has undeniably given the department a reprieve, as it was clear that they would have been left embarrassed by missing their self-imposed deadline on the roll out. We stand in agreement with the sentiment of the court that it is in the interest of the country, the economy and South Africans in general that the Digital Migration be finalized.

### **ICASA**

The DA is mindful that the release of more spectrum by ICASA means a better-quality service for consumers, with fewer dropped calls, faster internet download speeds and the promise of lower mobile data costs. The last time South Africa released spectrum was 2004/2005.

Therefore, the DA welcomes the auctioning of high demand spectrum licensing by ICASA, with the hope that it will indeed serve as a key pillar for the state's economic structural reforms. The slow pace of releasing the spectrum is a reminder that more than 28 years into democracy the digital divide remains and dare I say widens...This is a serious indictment on the ruling party and we note the efforts of civil society in fighting for the poor to have access to digital services.

Sadly, while ICASA and TELKOM were embroiled in a legal battle and the country left in limbo on the auction process, very little information came to the committee and as such we as members in this committee had to rely on media reports for updates, as the matter of spectrum auction was never placed on the recent formal agenda of the committee, while the auction and its challenges unfolded.

This speaks to the lux luster processes of this parliament. The mandate of portfolio committees as oversight bodies is clear, however the tendency of dealing with serious matters retrospectively continues, and this is a threat to our democracy. The DA calls on this parliament to strive to deal with matters in real time, if we are to improve anything in this country.

## **SITA**

The total capital expenditure requirement for State IT Agency for the Financial Year 2022/23 is budgeted at R750 million. However, the actual total Capex requirement far exceeds this amount. The notion that SITA may have to consider borrowing funds as well as applying for conditional grants in order to meet its capital expenditure requirements is worrying and a threat to the future of ICT in government. We call on the leadership of SITA to claim its market share and position itself as a worthy contender in the sector. If SITA fails, “E-Governance” will just be added to the failed lexicon of this government. The thought of any state-owned entity not been self-sufficient should keep all of us awake at night.

## **SENTECH**

The DA will monitor closely the SENTECH revenue stream, which is expected to decrease at an average annual rate of 1.3 per cent, from R1.5 billion in 2021/22 to R1.4 billion in 2024/25. The entity states that as a result of the analogue signal network being switched off, resulting in television revenue decreasing slightly before recovering again. Having considered the APP of Sentech, the Committee noted that Sentech is struggling to attract new customers.

## **TRAVEL & CONSULTANTS**

We call on the minister and the respective boards to provide oversight on the department’s travel and consultants’ costs as they seem to have the potential to be a money-making scheme, for instance:

### On Programme 3: ICT Policy Development and Research

The budgeted amount for travel over the MTEF is R15.1 million and for Consultants: Business and advisory services is R 13.6 million.

### On Programme 4: ICT Enterprise and Public Entity Oversight

The budgeted amount for travel over the MTEF is R14 million and Consultants budget over MTEF amount to R5.8 million.

### On programme 6: ICT Information Society Development and Capacity Development

The budgeted amount for travel over the MTEF is R12.4 million and for Consultants: Business and advisory services is R 36.4 million.

The approved committee calendar does not make dates for oversight inspections by members of this committee. We do acknowledge that the committee has a packed agenda, due to the size of the department we oversee, however not having plans for site visits means this committee will perpetually rely on second hand information from the officials on what is going, especially in the entities. Chairperson, as parliamentarians we have the duty to “go see for ourselves”.

In conclusion, the DA recommends an overhaul of the department and its entities by getting rid of weak political leadership, cadre deployment and corruption. All these have led to a lack of policy continuity and consequently, created uncertainty in the sector and market. If we get

this right, South African will enjoy strong and stable institutions which realize their mandates to improve lives of the poor and marginalized.

I THANK YOU!