

**VOTE 6: POLICY AND BUDGET SPEECH (2011-2012) PRESENTED BY THE MEC FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENVIROMENT AND TOURISM, MR NORMAN MOKOENA, MPL, TO THE MPUMALANGA PROVINCIAL LEGISLATURE AT RIVERSIDE, MBOMBELA LOCAL MUNICIPALITY.**

**Friday, 03 June 2011**

Honourable Speaker, Mr William Lubisi;  
Honourable Premier, Mr David Mabuza;  
Honourable Deputy Speaker, Ms Violet Siwela;  
Chief Whip of the Majority Party, Ms Thandi Shongwe;  
Colleagues in the Executive Council;  
Honourable Members of the Provincial Legislature;  
Executive Mayors and councillors present;  
Chairperson and members of the House of Traditional Leaders;  
Director General of the Province, Mr Jacob Rabodila;  
The Head of Department, Dr Vusanani Dlamini;  
Chairpersons of the Boards and CEOs of our Public Entities;  
Other Heads of Departments present;  
Representatives from the business community;  
Representatives from organised labour  
Members of the media;  
Distinguished guests;  
Comrades and friends;  
Ladies and gentlemen;

*Good Morning!*

## *INTRODUCTION*

Honourable Speaker and Honourable Members;

We are fresh from an election that has once again, delivered a landslide victory to the African National Congress. During this election, communities, black and white, young and old, able and impaired, gave us a mandate to use the system of local government to **Work together with them and Build Better Communities**. During the campaign, we heard of stories and met people who asked us to create more jobs and opportunities to better their lives. We also met communities who pleaded with us to work with them to ensure sustainable management of environmental and heritage resources.

We met workers, who said; please protect our jobs and rights; we also met young people who asked us to talk to business to provide them with post-school training opportunities. Our interactions with business also revealed frustrations with bureaucratic red-tape, and local government regulations that make it difficult for their business to survive.

Once again, let us be reminded that it is almost a year since our country hosted the first ever FIFA World Cup on African soil – Thousands of our people seized the opportunity of the world cup, and saw it as yet another chance to volunteer their skills, to market their country, to host the guests, and to fly our flag high.

Honourable members, the World Cup **legacy lives** - The legacy of which continued when 43 000 (forty three thousand) sport tourists came to celebrate the obvious Orlando Pirates treble win during the *Nedbank Cup*.

It is my sincere believe that this budget speech must be about an economy and an environment through which **we build better communities – sustaining this legacy**.

## ***ECONOMIC GROWTH AND FORECAST***

As we slowly, but with confidence and determination, recuperate from the impacts of the global economic recession, we emerge with an economic development and sustainability outlook that is promising, but not without hindrances and challenges. It is this state of our economy and human development, which has led us to make the choices we made.

In his inaugural *“State of the Nation Address,”* President Jacob Zuma, said *“the creation of decent work will be at the centre of our economic policies and will influence our investment attraction and job creation initiatives. In line with this undertaking, we have to forge ahead to promote an inclusive economy.”*

### **Economic Growth**

Mpumalanga, like the rest of the country, has experienced consistent economic growth, peaking to over 4 per cent in 2007 and 6.4 per cent in 2009. However, our economy took a knock due to the recession which was particularly harsh towards economies that are driven by heavy industry mainly mining, logistics and utilities.

Between 1996 and 2009, Mpumalanga’s GDP growth has been consistently below the national average of 3.2 per cent as it registered an average growth rate of 2.7 percent. The recession in 2009 resulted in a negative economic growth, with increasing unemployment.

Our mining and manufacturing sectors were therefore vulnerable to these shocks as demand for our commodities plunged on the global markets.

The Reserve Bank forecast a growth in the economy at a rate of 3.6 percent for South Africa in 2011. This follows from encouraging first quarter annualised national GDP growth figures of 4.8 percent for South Africa.

### **Employment:**

According to the quarterly labour force survey, our unemployment rate, as of the first quarter of 2011, stands at 30.8 percent, making us the province with the second highest unemployment rate after the Northern Cape (31.3%). A closer inspection of our employment data reveals that within the last year, employment in the agricultural and manufacturing industries increased slightly whereas the province experienced a decline in the mining sector.

In the past year, the industry that accounted for the biggest share of employment was trade, increased slightly by 2.8 percent (6 000 jobs) and the second largest, community and social services, fell by 6 percent (11 000 jobs).

### **Inflation:**

The South African Reserve Bank cut its benchmark interest rate three times to a 30-year low of 5.5percent in order to help spur consumer spending, which accounts for two-thirds of the demand in the economy. The Consumer Price Index for April 2011 shows a national annual inflation of 4 percent and 4.5 percent for Mpumalanga. The main drivers to provincial inflation are food, transport as well as housing and utilities.

It is also in the same vein that it has become increasingly important for our mainstream agricultural sector including, local subsistence farmers to be empowered to grow their own primary produce and through co-operatives, graduate to agro-processing operations, high value produce, not only as a value adding process but also to cushion against global inflationary pressures.

## ***THE PAST YEAR IN REVIEW - PROGRESS FROM 2010***

Despite this economic performance, we find courage in reporting some successes registered in the past year, without which our situation could have worsened.

### ***Supporting and growing our small businesses***

Two days ago, the National Youth Development Agency launched the month long national programme to commemorate the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of June 16 under the theme **“Youth Action for Economic Freedom in Our Lifetime.”**

In this pursuit we continued to implement the ***Business Launch Pad*** competition, which gives funding opportunities to all those aspiring entrepreneurs, with limited and tedious access from commercial banks. We have today in our midst some of the successful youth entrepreneurs, made in Mpumalanga and with the support, financing, mentorship of our department and our partners– **Because they deserve economic freedom in their lifetime**

One of the 2010 Business Launch Pad winners, Mandla Hlope a 25 year old youth has successfully launched a glossy lifestyle and business Magazine, **“Archive”** which is being distributed today - setting the pace, **Achieve** magazine has recently been selected as a runner-up in 2010 National Accenture Enablis Business LaunchPad competition.

In supporting potential SMME exporters, we can report that we facilitated training for 64 (sixty four) emerging exporters, with an additional 69 emerging exporters participating in National Expos and Exhibitions. To ease the cost of doing business and small business start-up, we have assisted 150 (one hundred fifty) SMMEs with the intricate processes of business registrations and tax compliance.

We share our accolades with SEDA which provided training both technical and business to 1487 SMMES, a further R1 million rand was spent on cooperatives development in the areas of marketing and business solutions.

Our jewel in the crown, is the total amount of R107, 2 million financing for SMMES from our development finance institutions (DFI's) facilitated by MEGA and SEDA. We see the funding agreement on infrastructure projects with DBSA as another vehicle with a potential to double this figure by next year.

### *Economic Empowerment*

Strongly believing that broad based economic empowerment in mega economic infrastructure should continue to have a trickledown effect on emerging entrepreneurs, creating jobs, and investing corporate social capital- we have made strides.

I am proud to announce that through our co-operation with Eskom, the construction of *Kusile Power Station* has created 7319, jobs with 3941, being from the province. In the next two years, employment will radically increase to 12000. ESKOM has further spent R2, 9 million in the Contractor Academy, and a further R16m in Enterprise Development initiatives -

Thank you *Eskom* for giving us hope and keeping the lights on for entrepreneurs in the province.

### *Tourism*

The **Pioneering Spirit** still hovers. The spirit hovers, as evidenced by the latest tourism rankings which put us as the third most visited destination in South Africa by foreign tourists.

Our Province has managed to attract 1,135 million foreign tourists in 2010, compared to 1,035 000 foreign tourists in 2009. This represents a 9,6% growth increase from the previous year. Whilst we continue to welcome these foreign tourists to our shores, South Africa's must continue to take a "short Left" and travel their own country

Our province, continues to attract numerous sporting and cultural events, these events have not only increased domestic tourism, but brought vibrancy, energy and opportunities to our SMMEs. However, *Destination Mpumalanga* has not attracted its fair share of the domestic tourist market. Our challenge therefore is to entice South Africans to come and visit Mpumalanga, and I am certain we will get there.

### *Regulating our economic activities – Business Regulation, Gambling and Liquor*

The protection of consumers from unscrupulous business practices continued to be on our radar screen during the previous financial year, as promised. I am pleased to announce that we managed to resolve 1696 consumer cases which resulted in **3 million, 215 thousand, 340 Rand** being recovered on behalf of consumers.

One of the major highlights was the prohibition and shut down of the SA Credit Blacklist Risk (Pty) (Ltd) - an unscrupulous business entity that defrauded government employees close to R1.1 million through fraudulent garnishee orders.

### **Liquor Licensing**

We received 863 new liquor licence applications in 2010, approved 538, and issued 328 licenses; five of which were 2010 FIFA World Cup special liquor licences. The province now has issued and currently operates on 1696 licences, the multiplier effect of these licensees on jobs at a ratio of 1: 4 translates into more than 6500, we need to emphasise that these licenses are linked to restaurants, bottle stores, hotel, lodges, taverns and so forth.

## Gambling and Betting

In continuing to regulate the gambling and betting industry in our province, the Mpumalanga Gambling Board (MGB) continues to pursue and monitor the transformation and empowerment performance by operators in line with the BBBEE Codes of Good Practice.

We can report that the recently launched 40 Machine site operator licence in Thaba Chweu, in Mashishing, is not just the only of its kind in South Africa, but has also brought about a R11 million investment, and 54 permanent jobs in the community of Mashishing. We are confident that this innovation, will be rolled out into five more sites, meaning 200 new jobs and an estimate R60 million. It is through this kind of strategic investments that we continue to build better communities

## *Our Earth Our Future - Sustainable Environmental Management*

In championing our conservation mandate, we managed to increase the hectares of land under conservation in the Province by 23 000 hectares from 229 000 hectares in 2009 to 252 000 hectares in 2010.

Despite challenges, in the process of Environmental Impact Assessment, we managed to approve **216 development applications**, under the National Environmental Management Act 107 of 1998

We are also proud to announce that one of our environmental awareness programmes, *the Pre-School Water Programme*, has achieved national and international accolades, winning us an award in the national category for Innovative Partnerships in Service Delivery in the Centre for Public Service Innovation Public Sector Awards.

## A YEAR OF JOBS AND GROWTH: OUR PLANS FOR 2011-2012 FINANCIAL YEAR

### Towards a new growth trajectory - The Provincial Growth Path

Honourable Members, in response to our socio-economic situation, our Premier, the Honourable DD Mabuza during the State of the Province Address, announced that we had initiated a process of developing a Provincial Economic Growth and Development Path and said *“central to the proposed Mpumalanga Economic growth and Development path, is economic growth that focuses on Job creation and the reduction of poverty and inequalities”* -

The MEGDP has been developed through a rigorous review of past economic and sector strategies, and is well informed by the current socio-economic outlook and future scenario. The growth is path anchored on critical job drivers, namely:

On **Infrastructure**, we acknowledge the contribution of infrastructure to a more inclusive economy and in meeting the needs of new industries and historically excluded communities. In this regard our focus is on massive infrastructural programmes on transport, energy, and water and information communications technology. Our road rehabilitation, as well as school renovation programme will create massive jobs and job opportunities, as well as opportunities for SMME in downstream supply chain

Secondly, the growth path requires us to transform our declining **agricultural sector** to focus on expanding farm-output and employment and increasing the agro-processing sector. In adding value to our commodities through we see **Manufacturing and Beneficiation as one driver that will transform agro, mining and chemicals** value chains within the province.

The Mpumalanga growth path puts an emphasis on new areas of nodal development with emphasis on **rural development, agriculture and forestry** – putting action to the vision of the comprehensive rural development programme.

Taking advantage of our culture, heritage and natural beauty, the growth path puts **Tourism and the Creative Industries and Culture Sector** at the core of our job creation efforts and a critical driver.

A great dependency of the growth path remains its ability to marshall the appropriate skills, address challenges like HIV and AIDS, as well as improve system wide governance, monitoring and evaluation.

For the Growth path to deliver on the jobs and growth, we will require partnership and investment, and the role of our social partners needs no emphasis. I am happy to announce, that since then, the provincial executive has approved the Growth Path for public and stakeholder consultations, to finalise targets and appropriate implementation forums.

Honourable Speaker, Honourable Members, we begin this financial year with the introduction of the Outcome-based approach to service delivery and programme implementation. Our mandate now requires us to lead and champion the delivery of two outcomes, namely:

**Outcome 4: Decent employment through inclusive growth.** Our primary focus therefore in terms of this outcome, would be on the creation of sustainable jobs, industrial and sector development with high labour absorbency; manufacturing and industrial development to increase competitiveness and ensuring the appropriate investment environment.

**Outcome 10: Environmental assets and natural resources that are well protected.**

The focus in relation to outcome 10 would be mainly on the quality of water, reduction of gas emissions and climate change, sustainable environment management and the protection of biodiversity.

We have, also as government acknowledged that we will have to craft a new vision for our economy, supported by interventions that maximizes positive socio-economic impact to the most vulnerable, being youth, women and rural communities. This acknowledgement has given rise to collective commitment to the Comprehensive Rural Development Programme (CRDP). The roll-out of the CRDP has presented new opportunities towards transforming rural economies, especially in the seven (7) identified municipalities.

In this regard, our Department has packaged projects and opportunities for each of the *CRDP* municipalities.

Honourable Members; the budget we are requesting today is intended to execute the plan we've submitted to this August House for approval. This we will do as directed by Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996; the PFMA, Act 1 of 1999 (as amended); and the Treasury Regulations. Allow me then to table our plans for the 2011-2012 financial-year:

**Integrated Economic Development**

The survival and prosperity of our small, medium and micro enterprises depends on the extent to which government nurtures and supports them. With regard to market access, actions will be undertaken by the department to increase demand for small enterprise products and facilitate their integration into the mainstream value chain through the implementation of the targeted procurement for small enterprises.

We will also continue to sensitize big companies and enter into agreements on transformation targets for local people to increase compliance levels for B-BBEE and ensure real empowerment for local people.

Companies doing business with the Provincial Government will undergo verification to ensure that they comply with the B-BBEE legislation and that further opportunities for black enterprises are strengthened, particularly rural communities, women, youth and people living with disabilities.

In realizing the potential of small enterprises to growth and employment, the Department will strengthen its support to improve both the supply side factors such as finance and technical support, and also finding ways to strengthen market opportunities for small enterprises including co-operatives.

We plan to establish five (5) SMME One-Stop Service Centres in each of the three (3) districts including an additional two located in Bushbuckridge and Piet Retief. The centres, herald an end to a situation where businesses, had to hop from one office to another for services.

These centres, will offer customised services integrating the work of the various economic development agencies ranging from business support, financial applications, company registration, tax advisory to name but a few

In our quest to empower and create entrepreneurs, we intend to facilitate the establishment of the Entrepreneurship School of Excellence, which is envisaged to develop entrepreneurial leaders and foster the creation of successful enterprises within communities of our province.

## Trade and Industry Development

In creating the much needed job opportunities, the department will this year; focus on priority sectors, namely, **agriculture, agro-processing and forestry; energy** as well as **mineral beneficiation; tourism and cultural industries;** and manufacturing especially in the tooling, plastics and chemicals industries.

As a result, in the agriculture, agro-processing and forestry value-chain, we will focus on the establishment of a food technology centre; facilitate the development of a fresh produce market; resuscitate a saw-mill as well as charcoal production and soya bean crushing plant. In the manufacturing sector, we will focus on the tooling initiative in the Steve Tshwete Local Municipality, and the development of an Industrial Park in Secunda that focuses on the plastics and chemicals industries.

Our projects in driving sector development are, to highlight but a few the following

- Fish farming
- Shoe making and Footwear manufacturing
- Pallet Making
- Agriculture ( Green Houses and Nurseries)
- Food processing (dried fruit, cereals, nutritional snack bar , pet food, organic fertilizers)

Beneficiation in the mineral sector will be supported by a mining and metals Industrial park in the Govan Mbeki Local Municipality. The tourism and cultural industries will be supported through the establishment of a creative industry super hub. Further measures will be taken to assist small enterprises to showcase their products through national and international pavilions in partnership with the Mpumalanga Economic Growth Agency and the Department of Trade and Industry.

The Department will continue to utilise MEGA taking cognisance of its current state, and to improve its performance to deliver the following set targets, in the 2011-2012 financial year.

- Attract new direct investment to the value of R300 million, and promote exports to the value of R120 million;
- Commence with the planning of 4 Industrial Parks in Balfour, Barberton, Mashishing and Middelburg;
- Refurbishment of existing industrial parks in historically neglected areas of high economic potential such as the Ka-Bokweni Industrial Area and Ekundastria
- Facilitate the establishment of 30 projects under the Comprehensive Rural Development Programme in the seven (7) identified municipalities. These projects include bakeries, vegetable tunnels, brick manufacturing, poultry and fish farming, pallet manufacturing and detergent production.

As we seize opportunities from emerging international markets we intend to complete the investment and export strategies. Our investment and trade promotion strategy will focus on ASEAN, BRIC and African countries, to this end we will develop an investment incentive scheme to reach out to these partners and allies.

## **Creating a sound regulatory environment for economic growth**

### **Consumer Services**

Honourable Speaker, the National Consumer Protection Act, Act No. 68 of 2008 which came into effect on 1<sup>st</sup> of April 2011, provides adequate consumer protection and recognizes the necessity to develop and employ innovative means to protect consumer rights. Through the Consumer Court, we will also continue to enforce the protection of consumer rights as contained in the Consumer Protection Act. To this effect, we envisage to resolve 2200 consumer cases in the current financial year.

## **Business Regulation**

In continuing to ensure compliance with the applicable liquor laws and regulations, we will continue to conduct ad-hoc inspections on liquor outlets in the Province. Our intention therefore, is to fully operationalise the Mpumalanga Liquor Licensing Act assented to by the Honourable Premier in May 2007. The Mpumalanga Liquor Authority, which will be a public entity, will be mandated to manage all liquor affairs in the province, in terms of the Mpumalanga Liquor Licensing Act, Act No. 5 of 2006.

## **Gambling**

The MGB will also continue to collect gambling levies due to the provincial fiscus, and at the same time, continue to encourage responsible gambling by intensifying public awareness campaigns to educate people about negative impacts associated with irresponsible gambling.

## **Towards Sustainability - Environmental Impact Management**

In our to manage environmental impact, we will continue to effectively review and authorise applications for Environmental Impact Assessments, in accordance with the applicable legislation and regulations to facilitate sustainable growth and development in the province.

As you are aware, South Africa will host the 17<sup>th</sup> Congress of Parties on Climate Change in Durban towards the end of this year, and as a build up to the event under the banner of the United Nations, we will facilitate the hosting of the Provincial Climate Change Summit in October this year.

We will further engage all stakeholders and the public on the compilation of the *Climate Change Mitigation and Response Strategy* for the Province.

In contributing towards mitigating the effects of climate change, it is our intention to plant 5000 trees during the 2011-2012 financial year. We therefore request our partners in this regard, to join us in this noble effort to enable us to collectively surpass the 13780 trees planted through joint efforts in the previous financial year.

### **Pollution and Waste Management**

Managing pollution and waste remains very high on our radar screen, hence we will continue to gather data and maintain the Air Quality Monitoring Networks in the Highveld Pollutant Priority Area.

This information has been critical for the compilation of an Air Quality Management Plan for the Highveld Pollutant Priority Area. It remains a critical tool to inform spatial development planning, and for the reduction of ambient air quality levels of pollution to meet national and international standards.

In relation to waste management, we plan to complete technical designs, site construction plans, and approve waste disposal for the Centralised Waste Management Facilities for Gert Sibande and Nkangala districts. The waste management infrastructure will form a strategic component for the mainstreaming of the green economy on waste management in the Province, and will be used as a case study and demonstration of International Best Practice on integrated waste management.

## **Environmental Compliance Monitoring and Enforcement**

Let me also take this opportunity to remind all of us that on Monday the 5<sup>th</sup> June, the global village will observe World Environment Day. Our simple call to you on this important day is to **Switch off – Recycle-Save Water-Plant Trees -and Change.**

It is our intention, to continue to protect, promote and strengthen enforcement and compliance with all environmental legislation, with specific reference to the National Environmental Management Act, the National Environmental Management Waste Act, and the National Environmental Management Air Quality Act.

We will this year capacitate officials in municipalities, and even designate them as Environmental Inspectors to enforce compliance in terms of the National Waste Management Act and Air Quality Act.

## **Seizing the Potential for New Economies**

The advent of the green economy also provides us with an opportunity to create more jobs. Taking advantage of the recently announced R190 million green economy fund by the industrial development cooperation (IDC), we will support the establishment of new enterprises in this sector. We also plan to exploit opportunities being afforded through waste management and alternative energy sources.

Our interventions, will in this regard, include the introduction of energy efficiency mechanisms in government buildings; this will trigger entrepreneurship and innovation, in electronic waste recycling and energy demand side management amongst others. We have commenced with the initial feasibility studies for broadband deployment in the province that will ultimately expand high speed multi-media ICT services to all government institutions and rural areas.

### *Regional and International Co-operation*

In order to claim a stake in the regional and international economies, we will focus on improving our relationship with Mozambique and Swaziland as part of improving our regional economic co-operation. To this we will develop an implementation plan with bankable projects for this tri-land cooperation agreement

### *ALLOCATION PER PROGRAMME: 2011-2012*

Honourable Speaker, allow me to present the proposed budget for **Vote 6: Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism**, per programme, for the financial year ending 31 March 2012:

#### **Programme 1: Administration**

An amount of **R92 million, 34 thousand** is proposed to be allocated to Programme 1 (Administration) in order to amongst others, continue to provide political policy directives; administrative, financial and other support functions to the Department.

#### **Programme 2: Integrated Economic Development**

Programme 2 (Integrated Economic Development) is proposed to be allocated an amount of **R167 million, 539 thousand**, to amongst others, continue to promote and develop small enterprises; facilitate local economic development and ensure the implementation of the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Policy. Included in this proposed budget, is an amount of **R143 million, 728 thousand**, to fund the Mpumalanga Economic Growth Agency (MEGA).

#### **Programme 3: Trade and Sector Development**

Programme 3, is proposed to receive an amount of **R251 million, 495 thousand** to amongst others, continue to ensure growth in exports and investment in the province; ensure the development of competitive industries; and enhance sustainable tourism growth.

This includes an amount of **R212 million, 949 thousand** to fund the Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency; and a further **R16 million** to the Zithabiseni Resort.

#### **Programme 4: Business Regulation**

To continue to ensure compliance with applicable liquor laws; gambling, business practices; and to implement consumer protection and awareness strategies, an amount of **R60 million, 224 thousand** is proposed to be allocated to this programme. Included in this amount, is **R39 million, 908 thousand** to enable the Mpumalanga Gambling Board to continue to fulfil its legislative mandates.

#### **Programme 5: Economic Planning**

In order to continue to formulate provincial economic policy priorities; drive provincial integrated economic planning and coordinate the implementation of the provincial growth path ; it is proposed that an amount of **R10 million, 553 thousand** be allocated to Programme 5, Economic Planning.

#### **Programme 6: Environmental Development**

Programme 6, Environmental Development, is proposed to receive a total amount of **R65 million, 896 thousand**, to amongst others, continue to facilitate sustainable development through environmental planning and governance, environmental awareness; integrated pollution, waste management and the promotion of biodiversity management in the province.

### **PROPOSED TOTAL BUDGET**

Honourable Speaker, Honourable Members, the total amount proposed to be appropriated to fund the requirements of **Vote 6: Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism for the 2011/2012 financial year is R647 million, 741 thousand**. This amount includes transfers to our three (3) public entities, totalling **R412 million, 585 thousand**.

## *CONCLUSION*

Our Economic research capacity needs to be enhanced in order provide optimum policy instruments; hence we intend to build relationships with economic research institutions as well as moving towards strengthening our internal capacity.

Honourable Members, it is clear that we have a lot of work ahead of us. Equally so, we have recognised that ours is not a journey we can embark on alone. We believe that to achieve most of our goals, we will require support and co-operation from a number of development agencies, and our colleagues in the national and local spheres of government, and we call for their partnership.

I equally realise that, the Department will require a well-oiled machinery in the public entities to implement some of the big ideas – I will therefore spare no efforts in ensuring that the Department and our public entities are focused on the job at hand.

As I close, allow me Honourable Speaker to salute the ruling party, the African National Congress, for continuing to listen to the plight of our people, especially of those marginalised and impoverished. Gratitude also goes to the Honourable Premier D.D Mabuza, for his selfless contribution, leadership and guidance.

I also like to thank my colleagues in the Executive Council and the Provincial Legislature who continue to provide support and encouragement.

My gratitude further goes to the Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee on Agriculture, Rural Development; Economic Development, Environment and Tourism, Honourable Member Refiloe Mahlobogoane, and her team for continuing to guide and oversee our work.

I am also grateful to my predecessor, former MEC for Economic Development, Environment and Tourism, Honourable Member J.L Mahlangu, for the foundation he has laid in the Department. The same goes to the former Head of the Department, Mr Rabeng Tshukudu, who was the longest serving HOD in the Provincial Administration.

Appreciation also goes to the current Head of Department, Dr Vusanani Dlamini and staff; the Boards and CEOs of our Public Entities; and all our partners in economic development.

To my wife, and children, thank you for continuing to support the work I've been mandated to perform.

**I thank you!**