

<b>MEDIA RELEASE</b>	PSA demands urgent ministerial intervention to protect graduates Municipal Environmental Graduate Programme
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<b>EMBARGO</b>	None
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The Public Servants Association (PSA) is extremely concerned about growing exploitation and mismanagement of the Municipal Environmental Graduate Programme implemented by the Department of Forestry, Fisheries, and the Environment (DFFE).

The PSA calls on the Minister to urgently intervene and ensure that the Department honours its commitments, restores fairness, and creates clear career opportunities for these graduates. The Programme, introduced to strengthen environmental management at local government level, was advertised as a two-year fixed-term contract with a fixed stipend of R9 200 per month. Reports from graduates deployed in KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape, Western Cape, Gauteng, North West, Mpumalanga, Limpopo, Free State and Northern Cape, however, reveal serious irregularities. Graduates are facing unexplained deductions ranging from R1 500 to R1 600, in addition to tax deductions, which leave them with significantly reduced pay. The Department has also communicated that these graduates will be paid on a daily rate, contradicting the original advertisement and undermining the integrity of government recruitment.

Further reports indicate that the graduates have not been provided with essential working tools such as laptops, personal protective equipment, or resources necessary to deliver on their responsibilities. Many are deployed in remote municipalities with no logistical support for transportation or accommodation. These failures violate fair labour practices and compromise service delivery in municipalities that depend on these graduates' expertise.

The PSA condemns the Department's handling of this programme as a direct contradiction of government's stated goals of empowering youth, creating sustainable employment, and building capacity in local government. Instead of providing opportunities, the Department has subjected these graduates to exploitation and uncertainty, pushing them into financial distress.

The PSA demands that the Minister of Forestry, Fisheries, and the Environment takes immediate corrective action. The fixed stipend of R9 200 must be reinstated, and all unlawful deductions refunded. The Department must withdraw the plan to impose a daily rate payment system, which destabilises income security. All graduates must be equipped with the necessary tools of trade to perform their duties safely and effectively. The PSA further calls for a transparent career pathing and absorption plan to ensure these graduates are not discarded at the end of their contracts and are integrated into permanent roles in the Public Service. A formal engagement process with organised labour, programme managers, and graduates must be established to address failures and ensure fairness.

The PSA encourages all affected graduates to join the PSA for proper representation and protection. Graduates are urged to contact PSA Provincial Offices to report their cases and receive immediate support. The PSA will

continue pursue fair treatment, improved working conditions, and secure career prospects for all participants in this Programme. Should the Department fail to act, the PSA will escalate this matter to Parliament, the Public Service Commission, the Auditor-General, and other oversight bodies to hold the Department accountable. Government employment programmes must represent opportunity, not exploitation. The current treatment of these graduates is unacceptable and requires urgent intervention.

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