

FOR PSA MEMBERS: LIMPOPO DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT,
ENVIRONMENT AND TOURISM

22-09-2023

Feedback: Meeting with Head of Department (HOD) – 21 September 2023

A bilateral meeting was held with the Department's HOD on 21 September 2023 where the following issues were discussed:

Non-provision of uniforms and protective clothing

Members are aware that the PSA raised this matter on several occasions without success, hence the escalation to the Office of the HOD. The provision of uniforms and protective clothing is not a favour, but a legal obligation by the employer in terms of the *Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA)*. The HOD reiterated the employer's commitment to procure the necessary uniforms, although the PSA was not convinced. The employer reported that it was in a process of collaboration with SANParks to utilise the same suppliers following the disappearance of the supplier in March 2023 when uniforms were to be delivered. The PSA cautioned the employer of the far-reaching implications of the failure to procure uniforms and protective clothing, including employees being mistaken as poachers, and not being able to make arrests in terms of the *National Environment Act*. In the same way that it is inconceivable to imagine police or soldiers without uniform, the same applies for Field Rangers. This is disorder of the highest order. The PSA also voiced discontentment with the prevailing situation that has not changed for some time. The employer should have been in the process of providing the next single pack of uniforms for 2023/24, hence the PSA will consider options to deal with this matter, including pursuing it in the Bargaining Chamber.

Accommodation

The working and living conditions of Field Rangers at most reserves are deplorable and do not comply with the requirements of the *Firearms Act*. The PSA proposed that the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure be approached, to urgently provide mobile offices and accommodation, whilst waiting for the necessary funding to maintain and renovate existing accommodation. Following lengthy deliberations, the HOD issued an instruction that unused mobile accommodation, generators, and fencing material at reserves be allocated to reserves where needed by the end of October 2023. The PSA welcomed this decision and will monitor implementation.

Understaffing and filling of posts

The employer reported that 50 Expanded Public Works Program (EPWP) workers had recently been appointed and would be allocated to various reserves, which would assist with maintenance of fences, and that a number of interns have also been appointed. The PSA reminded the employer that in the past there were more than 1 300 Nature Conservators, which were now reduced to a mere 350, and that EPWP workers and interns could not replace Field Rangers in doing law enforcement activities. The PSA thus called upon the employer to urgently address the problem of understaffing.

Training

Field Rangers have not been subjected to critical training such as refresher courses in use of allocated rifles, firefighting, law enforcement, and environmental knowledge and skills. Neither have they been provided with service kits for their rifles, which could lead to damage or render the weapon useless in a crisis. The HOD requested that Field Rangers provide their individual training needs to the HOD whereafter training needs would be prioritised by 30 November 2023.

Tools of trade

The PSA has been negotiating for members to be provided with two-way radios. The employer reported that it had explored the use of two-way radios and found that it would not be feasible owing to connectivity issues. The HOD reported that a decision had been taken to rather issue Field Rangers with cellphones. Employees will be informed through reserve managers on the process to be followed on or before 27 September 2023. The PSA views this as a major victory in the Union's efforts to ensure the safety of members.

Withdrawal of danger allowance and change in rank designation from Game Ranger to Conservation Labourer

The employer reported that it had approached the DPSA, requesting that Field Rangers are paid a danger allowance and was in the process of approaching the Office of the Premier regarding the unfair change in rank designation from Nature Conservator on SL5 to Conservation Labourer on SL2. The changing of the rank was not consulted in any forum and the PSA will table the matter at the Chamber whilst waiting for feedback on the issue of danger allowance.

Members will be updated on developments.

Employees who wish to join the PSA can contact Lawrence Muvhango on 082 880 8995 / lawrence.muvhango@psa.co.za or Paulina Moloto on 082 880 8957 / paulina.moloto@psa.co.za.

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