

## PROFESSIONS FRAMEWORK

**Built-environment professionals make strong objections to draft framework**

**Video Clip:** ECSA CEO Prof Ravi Nayagar in conversation with Engineering News Editor Terence Creamer on why it is objecting to a draft framework for built-environment professionals. Cameraperson: Danie de Beer. Editing: Darlene Creamer.

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- Built-environment professionals object strongly to draft framework

By: Terence Creamer

Published: 18 Apr 08 - 0:00

The Engineering Council of South Africa (ECSA), which says its very existence as an autonomous body is under threat by proposed revisions to the statutory framework for the built environment, delivered a detailed response to the Department of Public Works (DPW) last week, in which it appealed for a dramatically altered formulation.

The department released its policy document on the proposed amendments of the Statutory Regulatory Framework of the Built Environment Professions on March 4, giving interested and affected parties until March 28 to comment. The deadline was subsequently extended to April 11, following several objections, which argued that the schedule allowed little scope for consultation.

A key proposal in the draft was for the six existing professional councils within the built environment to be rationalised into a single 'super council', to be known as the 'South African Council of the Built Environment (SACBE)', and for the existing statutory bodies be converted into 'boards' under the SACBE.

Resources would be shared, implying that the larger professions, currently represented by ECSA and the South African Council for the Architectural Profession (SACAP), would probably crosssubsidise the smaller professions.

The councils affected included the Council for the Landscape Architectural Profession, the Council for the Project and Construction Management Profession, the Council for the Property Valuers Profession, the Council for the Quantity Surveying Profession (SACQSP), as well as SACAP and ECSA.

The content of the draft framework reportedly caught the councils by surprise, with the most outspoken critic being ECSA, which immediately described the framework as "flawed".

ECSA, SACAP and SACQSP also openly questioned the apparent haste with which the DPW was proceeding. In fact the architectural body argued that the "nonnegotiable timetable" would "stifle any meaningful, constructive and healthy debate".

Similarly, the SACQSP described the proposed amendments and the timeframe proposed as a "most unpleasant surprise", while stressing that it was willing to engage constructively with the concerns raised in the policy document.

Repeated attempts to gain an explanation from the department as to why it felt it necessary to proceed on the basis of the current formulation, as well as with such speed, proved unsuccessful.

More forthcoming was ECSA CEO Prof Ravi Nayagar. Speaking exclusively with Engineering News ahead of its submission Nayagar said that, while he could not reveal the precise details of its alternative proposal, he could confirm that it would resist plans for the creation of the SACBE.

He stressed that ECSA agreed wholeheartedly with the department's aspiration for improved access to the profession, accelerated transformation, and an enlarged training effort. But he argued that the solutions put forward in the draft framework were not only based on an outdated 2003 review, but were also premised on inaccurate "assumptions" and "generalisations".

"The creation of the SACBE will not achieve the desired outcomes and will further dilute the engineering profession by creating an even greater distance between the professionals and the council," Nayagar argued.

The quantity surveyors, meanwhile, described SACBE as "too unwieldy to tackle the cited shortcomings in the present regulatory framework".

In a written response to the department, SACQSP registrar Prof Gaye Le Roux said it was inconceivable that a single board would effectively and adequately monitor and control the activities of boards that oversee the roles of the various built-environment professions with wide-ranging expertise and interests.

"The immediate impact of the proposed change is the loss of morale among current, knowledgeable staff of the councils and potential difficulty of achieving voluntarism in the service of councils," Le Roux added.

Access and transformation, in Nayagar's view, were indeed key priorities, but it objected to the notion that barriers were still in place for black professionals.

"Access to the engineering profession is limited only by the potential of the individual to develop the competencies necessary for admission to the educational programme. And, I must stress that, as ECSA, we are right at the end of that value chain, with access really being determined by the standard of schooling, particularly in maths and science," Nayagar asserted.

He added that all transformation efforts were also subject to the constraints to the educational pipeline.

"That said, we are playing an active role within the Joint Initiative for Priority Skills Acquisition, or Jipsa, to support and improve technical education and training efforts. Further, we are working with industry to improve access to work opportunities for those who require practical work experience in order to graduate."

#### **INDEPENDENCE SEEN AS CRUCIAL**

ECSA suggested that priority attention should rather be given to improving the functioning of the existing Council for the Built Environment (CBE), rather than seeking to erode the independence and autonomy of the professions.

For ECSA, independence from government prescriptions on standards had to be sustained as a guiding principle, particularly if South Africa was intent on retaining its high standing within the international engineering fraternity.

The council was a signatory to the Washington, Sydney and Dublin Accords, governing professional engineers, professional engineering technologists and professional engineering technicians respectively.

But Nayagar warned that it should not be taken for granted that the country's status would be preserved under the proposed SACBE. In fact, he noted that there were a number of instances where engineers had been precluded on the basis of an actual or perceived interference by their respective governments on the administration of standards.

"We could be placing this international standing and accreditation at risk, with could dampen morale at a time when the country really requires contented professionals, particularly given the opportunities abroad," he cautioned.

South African-trained professional engineers remained the only engineering professionals in Africa to have gained such accreditation, and there was a desire, under the New Partnership for Africa's Development, to move the entire continent in the same direction.

Meanwhile, SACAP, which would deliver its detailed response by Friday, containing legal opinion, also felt the current draft missed the mark.

President Malcolm Campbell wrote recently that he was concerned that the policy document focused too narrowly on changes to the regulatory environment, and did not deal with the challenge of sustainable delivery.

"Of critical concern, is that the effort and time involved in establishing such a new structure will divert energies away from the urgent and overdue interventions necessary to address the challenges of transformation, which are demanding immediate and drastic interventions," Campbell said.

Engineering News understands that SACAP would also like to see the review process broadened beyond the DPW, to include other departments such as Trade and Industry, and Transport, given its cross-cutting implications, which extended beyond the purview of the DPW.

*To watch a video in which ECSA CEO Prof Ravi Nayagar explains to Engineering News Editor Terence Creamer the reasons for its objection to the draft framework go to [www.engineeringnews.co.za](http://www.engineeringnews.co.za) and click 'Video clips'.*

Edited by: Martin Zhuwakinyu

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By: Chanel Pringle

Published: 18 Jul 08 - 0:00

The Engineering Council of South Africa (Ecsa) last week said it had reached a milestone with about 29 000 qualified engineering practitioners now registered, which it said indicated the engineering industry's confidence in the council.

Previously disadvantaged persons accounted for 56% of new registrations over the last three years, which accounted for the greatest increase in numbers.

"In light of the current skills crisis in South Africa and the ongoing attempt to register all qualified engineering practitioners in the country, Ecsa is proud to announce that it has reached the highest registration record in history," commented Ecsa senior operations manager **Neggie Ndlovu**.

Edited by: Martin Zhuwakinyu

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LEGISLATION

## **Ecsa makes submission on proposed Built Environment Professions Bill**

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By: Creamer Media Reporter

Published: 31 Jul 08 - 16:50

The Engineering Council of South Africa (Ecsa) on Thursday said it had requested the opportunity to make a verbal presentation of its submission on the proposed Built Environment Professions Bill, at the public hearings to be held by the portfolio committee on Public Works on August 12 and August 13.

The submission would provide some initial constructive inputs and would highlight concerns the council had about the potential negative consequences the proposed Bill could have on the engineering profession, Ecsa said in a media statement.

The council would, in the meantime, consult with its stakeholders and further develop its input for consideration by the portfolio committee.

It further stated that it supported the objectives of the proposed Bill, as current legislation had certain shortcomings that required attention to deal with the challenges that had been identified in the proposed Bill.

Any changes to the regulatory environment governing the profession and the administrative structures that served the profession had to be carefully considered to avoid disruption to the profession, noted the council, saying the engineering profession played an important role in the much-needed maintenance and expansion of existing infrastructure, the delivery of basic services and in sustaining economic growth and development.

Ecsa said the proposed Bill did not take into account the role that voluntarism played in giving effect to the regulations of the industry and the development of the profession.

The council also stated that the proposed Bill did not take into account the importance of peer judgement and review in ensuring the standards of the profession, or the potential impact of the profession losing its international recognition.

A number of other concerns were also raised, including the envisaged transition and the financial and administrative viability of a new proposed council structure, as well as the technical aspects of the proposed Bill and conflicts with other legislation.

"Once this process is concluded and there is clarity on the way forward, Ecsa will undertake expansive planning and consultation with its voluntary organisations to ensure that the interest of the profession and the public continues to be served and to minimise any potential negative impact," commented Ecsa CEO Professor Ravi Nayagar.

Edited by: Mariaan Olivier

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- Daily podcast - April 15, 2008

By: Terence Creamer

Published: 14 Apr 08 - 12:23

The South African Institution of Civil Engineering (SAICE), a voluntary body representing some 8 000 members, has added its voice to the growing chorus of objections being raised about a Department of Public Works (DPW) proposal for the overhaul of the regulatory framework governing built-environment professionals.

In a formal response to the department, SAICE president **Johan de Koker** and executive director **David Botha** raised particular concern about the potential negative consequences for the international accreditation of South Africa education programmes.

The department released the policy document on the proposed amendments of the Statutory Regulatory Framework of the Built-Environment Professions on March 4, giving interested and affected parties until March 28 to comment. The deadline was subsequently extended to April 11.

A key proposal in the draft was for the six existing professional councils to be rationalised into a single 'super council', to be known as the 'South African Council of the Built Environment (SACBE)', and for the existing statutory bodies be converted into 'boards' under the SACBE.

The councils affected included the Engineering Council of South Africa, the South African Council for the Architectural Profession, the Landscape Architectural Profession, the Council for the Project and Construction Management Profession, the Council for the Property Valuers Profession, and the Council for the Quantity Surveying Profession.

The affected councils all had misgivings and had responded formally. But there was also an overwhelming objection to the speed with which DPW was moving, with many arguing that this would stifle healthy debate.

Fresh attempts to gain an explanation from the department as to why it felt it necessary to proceed on the basis of the current formulation, as well as with such speed, proved unsuccessful on Monday.

In its letter to the department, SAICE stressed that it supported many of the principles and aspirations contained in the draft, including a desire to accelerate the development, transformation and compulsory registration of professionals; the need to strengthen the existing Council for the Built Environment; as well as the need for inclusiveness and the strengthening of the smaller councils.

But it said it did not believe the structural changes proffered would address the objectives of the policy. "It is, for example, debatable whether structural changes as such would facilitate major administrative efficiencies," De Koker and Botha wrote.

But, more crucially, SAICE stressed it could not support any changes that might negatively affect the international accreditation of its members.

"The competencies and recognition of the South African built-environment professions ultimately benefit the South African society and the economy at large in a fiercely-competitive global environment. These competencies need to be maintained and enhanced," Saice stressed.

In a separate note to the department, Botha also cautioned that civil-engineering students were extremely concerned about the impact that the proposed changes could have on their international standing.

Quoting an interaction with 80 University of Johannesburg civil-engineering students, which took place on April 10, Botha reported that these future professionals were "seriously concerned".

It appears that the main concern was that the envisaged overhaul could negatively affect the quality of their degrees and their future professional status. "The second concern was that, in terms of international reciprocity agreements, their degrees and professional status could be in jeopardy," Botha wrote.

Edited by: Terence Creamer

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