

## Engineering's integrity questioned

**The new Ecsa council is 'unlawful and weakens the profession's quality and safety'**

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**DISCORD:** Engineers are opposed to the Ecsa council due to the manner in which appointments were made.

KEY players in the engineering industry are taking legal action against the Department of Public Works (DPW) and the Engineering Council of South Africa (Ecsa), alleging that the appointment of the new Ecsa council is unlawful.

They say Ecsa's role is vital to the quality of engineering infrastructure services, as it registers engineering practitioners and regulates their practice, it also accredits education and training programmes in various fields of engineering – ensuring high standards and global recognition.

The court action arises from alleged irregularities in the appointment of Ecsa's current 50-person council in September last year, changes were made – without the legally-required consultation – to the outgoing council's approved list of members for the new council.

The Engineering Profession Act 2000 requires the Minister of Public Works to consult with the council if there are insufficient nominations.

There were 46 names and four vacancies in the list approved by the council last March.

The court papers allege that the final list of council members officially inducted by the minister in September comprised 49 individuals with one vacancy – and that six people on the approved list were removed without consultation.

The South African Institution of Civil Engineering (Saice), who is leading the legal action on behalf of 14 engineering associations and their 50 000-plus membership, the appointment of the current council is therefore illegal – throwing the integrity of Ecsa into question and weakening the engineering profession in terms of quality and safety.

"By undermining the quality of oversight of engineering practitioners in South Africa, the entire pipeline of engineering infrastructure services, manufacturing and production will be at risk," Saice CEO Manglin Pillay said.

"This could potentially result in the health and safety of the public being placed in jeopardy."

Consulting Engineers South Africa (Cesa), the allegations of compromised good governance, the lack of consultation with affected industries, and the questionable entity of the appointments under the guise of transformation will erode their profession and impact on the industry both locally and internationally.

"Our citizens deserve to experience less flooding, and fewer bridge or roof collapses, not more," Cesa CEO Chris Campbell said. Cesa has more than 500 member companies, employing more than 20 000 people countrywide.

South African consultants work extensively globally and specifically in neighbouring states. International accreditation through the Sydney, Dublin and Washington Accords, is dependent on a substantial peer review system for professional registration with Ecsa, which the new council would allegedly replace with another system.

The judgment extensive peer review system and consequently compromise the recognition of professionally registered engineering practitioners internationally – as it is a prerequisite for being a signatory to these accords. Government-supported efforts to export professional services would thus also be jeopardised.

Industry players who have joined the

court action say that the lack of integrity in the new Ecsa council appointment process has opened the door for individuals who are unknown to the industry and who now have undue influence over the profession.