

Submission On The Proposed Built Environment Professions Bill To The Portfolio Committee On Public Works

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ECSA has, in response to the advertisement by the Portfolio Committee on Public Works on 27 June 2008 made a submission on the Built Environment Professions Bill and requested an opportunity to make a verbal presentation on its submission during the scheduled Public Hearings on 12 and 13 August 2008.

The submission set out to provide some initial constructive input and highlight concerns ECSA has about the potential negative consequences of the proposed Bill on the engineering profession. Very limited time and opportunity was given for stakeholders to consider the implications and the potential impact of the proposed Bill. ECSA is making use of the time still available before the scheduled Public Hearings on the proposed Bill to consult with its key stakeholders and further develop its input for consideration by the Portfolio Committee.

ECSA hopes that the Portfolio Committee and the Department will consider ECSA's input and the input and concern of other stakeholders to amend the proposed Bill and mitigate the possible negative consequences of the proposed Bill.

ECSA supports the objectives of the proposed Bill in so far as that ECSA believes that the current Acts have certain shortcomings that require attention to address the challenges identified in the proposed Bill.

The engineering profession plays an important role in the urgently needed maintenance and expansion of existing infrastructure, deliverance of basic services and also to sustain economic growth and development. Any changes to the regulatory environment governing the profession and the administrative structures that serve the profession must be carefully considered to avoid unnecessary disruption to the profession.

The process of compiling the policy that has led to the proposed Bill has allowed little time for such consideration and has not afforded stakeholders with any meaningful opportunity for input.

The proposed Bill does not take into account the:

- crucial role that voluntarism plays in giving effect to the regulations of the industry and the development of the profession
- importance of peer judgement and review in ensuring the standards of the profession
- the potential impact of the loss of international recognition

ECSA's recommendations on the proposed Bill includes that:

- International recognition should be retained and protected
- The provision for peer review needs to be strengthened
- The representation of the different engineering disciplines must be better reflected in the proposed Council and Board
- Several areas of concern needs to be addressed which includes:
 - the envisaged transition and the financial and administrative viability of a new proposed structure
 - 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 minimize any potential negative impact.” commented Professor Ravi Nayagar, Chief Executive Officer, ECSA.

Additional information about ECSA:

ECSA is responsible, in partnership with Government and the engineering profession, for protecting the public interest in health, safety and the environment in relation to the work done by engineering professionals. This is achieved by ECSA setting the standards of academic qualifications and practical training required for registration as a practitioner, administrating the process of accreditation and registration, providing the public with an effective mechanism for ensuring high quality professional performance and investigating and sanctioning unprofessional conduct.

The engineering disciplines regulated by ECSA extend beyond the traditional built environment and includes nine main disciplines, namely, Aeronautical, Agricultural, Chemical, Civil, Electrical and Electronic, Industrial, Mechanical, Mining and Metallurgical Engineering.

Most of the persons registered by ECSA are members of Voluntary Associations who meet their needs for professional development through conferences, courses and publications, provide a forum for technical discourse and promote the recruitment of candidates for the profession. Thirty eight (38) Voluntary Associations have been recognized by ECSA as provided for in the Act and about thirty (30) others are included in ECSA's group of stakeholders.

A significant milestone was recently achieved when the number of voluntary registrations reached 29 348 persons including 6 790 candidate-engineering practitioners. Previously disadvantaged persons accounted for 56% of new registrations over the past three years and for the greatest increase in registered professionals.

In spite of the significant growth in the number of registered engineering professionals, South Africa still faces a critical shortage of engineering skills These skills are urgently needed for maintaining and expanding existing infrastructure, delivering basic services and to sustain economic growth and development. The engineering profession as is the case with other professional services needs a concerted effort to promote and facilitate the entry of more previously disadvantaged persons especially women to the profession.

The last few years have seen a significant increase in the number of foreign Engineering

practitioners, particularly from other Southern African countries applying for registration with ECSA. Currently there are about 5 000 foreign practitioners registered with ECSA. ECSA is assisting with building capacity and accreditation of engineering programmes at universities in Botswana and Mozambique.

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