



ADVISORY NOTE: SAC2025/002ADV

ADVISORY NOTE ON THE PROFESSIONALISATION AND REGISTRATION OF INDIVIDUALS PERFORMING NATURAL SCIENTIFIC WORK

1. INTRODUCTION

This advisory note provides guidance to individuals performing natural scientific functions, as well as employers across national, provincial and local government and the private sector. Its purpose is to explain the legal requirement for registration with the South African Council for Natural Scientific Professions (SACNASP), outline the importance of professionalising natural scientific work, and support sound scientific governance, ethical practice and effective service delivery.

2. WHO THIS ADVISORY NOTE IS FOR

This advisory note is intended for:

- Individuals performing natural scientific work who are not yet registered with SACNASP.
- Government departments, municipalities, public entities and regulatory authorities that employ staff in natural scientific roles.
- Private sector firms, consultancies, laboratories, mining industry, agricultural organisations and environmental practitioners who rely on natural scientific expertise.

3. REGULATORY MANDATE AND CONTEXT

SACNASP is a statutory professional regulatory body established under Section 2 of the Natural Scientific Professions Act, 2003 (Act No. 27 of 2003). The Act mandates SACNASP to regulate the natural scientific professions, protect the public and ensure that natural scientific work is performed only by competent, ethical and registered professionals.

Section 18 of the Act requires any individual who performs natural scientific work to be registered with SACNASP in an appropriate category and field of practice. Registered professionals are further bound by the SACNASP Code of Conduct and must maintain their competence through Continuing Professional Development.



The Presidential Directive on Professionalisation of the Public Sector and the National School of Government's National Framework Towards the Professionalisation of the Public Sector reinforce the expectation that technical and scientific roles across government must be occupied by individuals who hold statutory professional designations. Pillar 4 of the Framework emphasises Continuing Learning and Professional Development. SACNASP's CPD system directly supports this requirement by ensuring ongoing professional competence.

4. WHY REGISTRATION MATTERS

FOR INDIVIDUAL SCIENTISTS

- Registration is a legal requirement under Section 18 of the Act.
- It provides recognised professional status in the national science and innovation system.
- It enhances marketability and strengthens career mobility across government and industry.
- Registered scientists may sign off scientific work that carries legal, regulatory or public safety implications.
- Registration provides ethical protection through adherence to SACNASP's Code of Conduct.
- It reduces personal exposure to liability when performing technical or scientific work.

FOR GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC SECTOR EMPLOYERS

- Employing registered scientists supports compliance with the Presidential Directive on Professionalisation.
- It aligns with the NSG Framework's focus on professional designations and continuous learning.
- It strengthens governance, oversight and audit outcomes.
- It ensures that scientific decisions, assessments and reports are legally defensible.
- It reduces environmental, financial and operational risk associated with technical errors.
- It improves service delivery in areas such as water quality, environmental health, biodiversity protection and climate resilience.
- Appointing unregistered individuals to roles requiring registration may be considered irregular.

FOR PRIVATE SECTOR EMPLOYERS

- Registered scientists provide a consistent baseline of competence and ethical accountability.
- Registration reduces operational and environmental risks by ensuring scientific outputs are accurate and defensible.
- Technical reports require sign off by a Professional Natural Scientist.
- Employing registered scientists enhances organisational credibility and regulatory compliance.
- SACNASP's CPD system ensures employees commit to remaining up to date with evolving scientific and regulatory requirements.



5. PRACTICAL STEPS TO TAKE

5.1 If You Are an Unregistered Scientist

- Confirm whether your work involves natural scientific functions as defined under the Act.
- Review the SACNASP registration categories to identify the appropriate field of practice.
- Gather your supporting documentation, qualifications and experience records.
- Submit an application for registration through the SACNASP online portal at www.sacnasp.org.za
- Begin participating in Continuing Professional Development activities.

5.2 If You Are a Government or Public Sector Employer

- Conduct a workforce audit to identify roles performing natural scientific functions.
- Ensure job descriptions and recruitment processes specify SACNASP registration where required.
- Verify registration status before appointment and during employment.
- Ensure tenders and technical reports requiring scientific oversight are signed by appropriately registered professionals.
- Support staff participation in CPD activities to maintain competence.

5.3 If You Are a Private Sector Employer

- Verify SACNASP registration for employees who perform natural scientific work.
- Include registration requirements in recruitment, procurement and tender processes.
- Ensure technical reports and assessments are signed by registered professionals.

Encourage and support CPD participation to ensure ongoing technical competence.



6. CONSEQUENCES OF NON-REGISTRATION

Failure to comply with the Natural Scientific Professions Act has serious implications:

Legal Implications

- Performing natural scientific work without registration contravenes Section 18 of the NSP Act.
- Reports or assessments signed by unregistered individuals may be invalid or challenged.

Professional Implications

- Unregistered individuals cannot sign off work that carries legal, environmental or public safety responsibilities.
- They are not subject to the SACNASP Code of Conduct or its disciplinary mechanisms.

Institutional Implications

- Employing unregistered individuals for regulated scientific roles may expose institutions to audit findings and compliance risks.
- Scientific decisions made by unregistered individuals who are not bound by SACNASP's Code of Conduct may lack the accountability and ethical oversight required, increasing the risk of financial, environmental and compliance liabilities.

Public Implications

- Incorrect scientific advice or assessments may compromise public safety, environmental protection and community trust.

7. CONCLUSION

Professionalising natural scientific work is essential for strengthening scientific governance, supporting effective service delivery and ensuring ethical and competent practice across the public and private sectors. SACNASP is committed to supporting individuals and employers in meeting statutory requirements, maintaining high professional standards and contributing to a capable, ethical and developmental state. All individuals performing natural scientific work are encouraged to register with SACNASP, and all employers are urged to ensure compliance with the Act and national professionalisation directives.

8. CONTACT INFORMATION

For further information, queries, or clarification, registered scientists are encouraged to contact SACNASP at mbmatabane@sacnasp.org.za.