



## **LEGAL AND COMPLIANCE PRACTICE NOTE: SAC2025/001PN**

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### **Practice Note for Registered Natural Scientists: Authority to Sign Reports in Terms of the Natural Scientific Professions Act (NSP Act)**

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#### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The South African Council for Natural Scientific Professions (SACNASP) is a regulatory body mandated by the Natural Sciences Professions Act No. 27 of 2003 (NSP Act). SACNASP's role is to ensure the professional conduct and the continuous advancement of natural science professions in South Africa.

This practice note addresses all natural scientists regarding the issue of reports signing authority, particularly in interdisciplinary fields of practice. This has been identified as a growing challenge by practicing natural scientists.

#### **2. ISSUES AND CONCERNS REGARDING SIGNING AUTHORITY**

A recurring issue has been raised concerning the signing authority for natural science related professional reports. Professionals registered across various fields of practice have sought clarification from the Chairpersons of these fields of practice regarding their responsibilities.

Key questions have included:

- Whether a professional registered in one field of practice (e.g. Ecological Science) may sign off on studies within another field, whether overlapping or not, like Agricultural or Soil Science.
- Whether a professional registered in one field but with substantial experience in another field of practice, whether overlapping or not, is permitted to sign off on reports relating to that other field of practice.

The concerns pertained to specific fields of practice, however, this legal and compliance practice note is relevant to all practicing scientists in their respective fields of practice.



### 3. ADHERENCE TO NSP ACT AND CODE OF CONDUCT

Natural Scientists must strictly adhere to the NSP Act concerning fields of practice and subcategories.

Natural Scientists are also reminded to comply with the Code of Conduct at all times: **Section 2.3.1** of the Code of Conduct clearly states that practicing scientists *"must only undertake natural scientific work for which their education, training and experience have rendered them competent to perform and is within the category of their registration."*

### 4. CATEGORIES OF REGISTERED PERSONS AND SIGNING AUTHORITY

The NSP Act, in section 18, defines the categories for registered persons in the natural scientific professions as follows:

- Professional natural scientist:
- Candidate natural scientist;
- Certificated natural scientist.

Section 22 (2) of the NSP Act further clarifies that a certificated natural scientist or candidate natural scientist:

- May only perform work in the natural scientific profession under the supervision and control of a professional natural scientist.
- Must use his or her title in all natural scientific reports and other documentation relating to his or her work in the natural scientific profession prepared by him or her.

Therefore, only Professional Natural Scientists must sign off on the submission of a report. Certificated Natural Scientists and Candidate Natural Scientists can only perform work under the supervision and control of a registered Professional Natural Scientist.



## **5. CONSEQUENCES OF NON-COMPLIANCE**

Natural scientists are urged to act within their registered scope and competence. Failure to comply with the Code of Conduct constitutes improper conduct, which may result in the scientist being found guilty and sanctioned under Section 33 (3) of the Natural Scientific Professions Act which sanctions include but are not limited to the cancellation of registration and the imposition of fines.

SACNASP reserves the right to escalate cases of improper conduct to other relevant tribunal authorities and law enforcement when necessary.

## **6. SEEKING GUIDANCE AND FURTHER INFORMATION**

Any doubts about competency, overlap of fields, or signing authority should be directed to SACNASP for guidance before proceeding.

For additional queries or clarifications, natural scientists are encouraged to contact SACNASP directly on [sacnasp@sacnasp.org.za](mailto:sacnasp@sacnasp.org.za) or visit the official SACNASP website.

## **7. DISCLAIMER**

The purpose of this Practice Note is to give advice on best legal practices in the Natural - Sciences. Advice is given in good faith and SACNASP disclaims all liability for any loss, damage or expense that may be incurred through acting on such advice. This Practice Note is to be read in conjunction with the NSP Act and the Code of Conduct, and it does not replace them.