

About the Institution

The South African Maritime Safety Authority (SAMSA) is a national public entity that regulates maritime safety and environmental protection within South African waters and for South African-registered vessels globally. It sets and enforces ship safety standards, certifies seafarers, monitors compliance with maritime laws, conducts search-and-rescue operations, and maintains an operational presence in all major South African port cities. It reports to the Minister of Transport, and the SAMSA Board is its accounting authority. In 2024/25, its operating expenditure was R680.6m.¹

Flag Status

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
								
Improper appointments	Co-opting key functions	Climate of fear or favour	Corrupt awards	Financial malpractice	Obstructing accountability	Manipulating perceptions	Private gain	Shadow network

ISS Analysis

- ACTis has raised one flag for SAMSA and placed two under monitoring.
 - After at least five years of leadership instability linked to allegations against former Chief Operations Officer (COO) Sobantu Tilayi, who has since left, the appointments of a new Board and a permanent Chief Executive Officer (CEO) in late 2025 give SAMSA the opportunity to stabilise its governance structures. However, findings on organisational culture, consequence management and historical financial control weaknesses suggest that rebuilding a culture
- of accountability remains a key challenge for the institution's current leadership.

 - SAMSA’s financial governance is improving, as evidenced by a reduction in irregular expenditure and four consecutive unqualified audits.
 - The handling of the former COO’s disciplinary processes by the previous two Boards and the internal functions responsible for administering them raises questions about SAMSA’s commitment to consequence management and accountability.



Flag raised



Flag lowered



Under monitoring

Findings

Flag #1

Improper Appointments

There are indications of resilience under the flag, with key senior official vacancies filled and the departure of a senior executive allegedly responsible for maladministration.

- In November 2025, SAMSA appointed Captain Dennis Mqadi as its first permanent CEO since 2016.² This followed multiple unsuccessful attempts to fill the position because of 'disruptions' in the recruitment process. In one instance, an anonymous report submitted to the Minister of Transport indicated that the recommended candidate was unsuitable for the role, and the process was restarted. These failures resulted in a succession of acting CEO appointments over nine years.³
- In December 2025, the SAMSA Board was reconstituted, with Advocate Vusumzi Sihawu appointed as Chairperson and Mervyn Burton as Vice Chairperson. One member from the 2023 Board, Advocate Nosipho Sobekwa, remains on the Board.⁴
- Tilayi, who was appointed COO in 2011, resigned from SAMSA in December 2025.⁵ He was central to allegations of maladministration at SAMSA and was suspended twice before resigning.
 - Before joining SAMSA in 2008, Tilayi was reportedly dismissed from the Transnet National Ports Authority on charges of dishonesty and interfering with tender processes.⁶
 - In 2018, South African Marine Fuels (SAMF) (a company that provides offshore bunkering and ship service operations) alleged that Tilayi irregularly pressured them to accept a particular Black Economic Empowerment shareholder in return for SAMSA's regulatory approval to refuel ships offshore. In 2024, the Pretoria High Court issued a declaratory order that Tilayi had acted illegally in his dealings with SAMF.⁷
 - In April 2021, Tilayi was suspended for two and a half years on full pay pending an independent forensic investigation following allegations of misconduct by internal and external whistleblowers, including allegations by SAMF and the Disabled People of South Africa (DPSA) (see Flag #6: Obstructing Accountability).⁸ In 2022, an internal report recommended disciplinary action against Tilayi after finding that the whistleblower allegations were substantiated.⁹ Despite this, the Board cleared Tilayi and reinstated him in October 2023.¹⁰
 - Tilayi was suspended again in late 2024 for alleged irregularities related to office rental agreements and legal services.¹¹ He resigned before disciplinary proceedings had been finalised.



Flag raised



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- In December 2025, the Public Protector's investigation into the appointment of Vusumzi Gladwell September as SAMSA's Executive of Corporate Affairs in 2021 found that it constituted maladministration. Tilayi, who was acting CEO at the time, failed to recuse himself as head of the selection panel, despite being a close associate of September, and overlooked more qualified applicants. September is no longer in the position, having been redeployed on an international assignment.¹²
- In April 2022, a forensic investigation into allegations of misconduct recommended disciplinary action against Chief Human Capital Officer Lesego Mashishi and Company Secretary Lolo Raphadu (see Flag #6: Obstructing Accountability). Both were dismissed following disciplinary processes and have since been replaced.¹³

Flag #3

Climate of Fear or Favour



The flag is being monitored to determine whether a broader pattern of favouring compliant individuals exists, which is unattractive to potential newcomers.

- In 2024/25, the Auditor-General of South Africa (AGSA) found that SAMSA took insufficient disciplinary action against officials who incurred irregular expenditure. This was linked to a failure to maintain adequate records to support investigations into irregular expenditure.¹⁴
- In 2024/25, SAMSA reported a 23% vacancy rate for professionally qualified employees.¹⁵

Flag #5

Financial Malpractice



The flag is raised because weaknesses in financial management and internal controls have contributed to significant historical irregular expenditure.

- In 2024/25, the AGSA found internal control deficiencies related to the entity's failure to prevent irregular, fruitless and wasteful expenditure. The AGSA also found that the entity failed to maintain adequate records to implement consequence management.¹⁶
- Historical irregular expenditure incurred during and before 2021/22 resulted in cumulative irregular expenditure of R612m by 2024/25. This amount was equivalent to 90% of SAMSA's expenditure for the 2024/25 financial year.¹⁷
- Despite the scale of historical irregular expenditure, SAMSA's financial governance has improved in recent years. Irregular expenditure decreased from R22m in 2021/22 (45.13% of that year's expenditure) to R2.9m in 2024/25 (0.35% of that year's expenditure).¹⁸



Flag raised



Flag lowered



Under monitoring

Having received consecutive qualified audits between 2016 and 2021, SAMSA has received unqualified audit opinions for the last four years.¹⁹

Flag #6

Obstructing Accountability



The flag is being monitored to determine whether delays in responding to misconduct allegations and investigation findings reflect a broader pattern of avoiding accountability.

- The SAMSA Boards appointed in 2020 and 2023 repeatedly failed to act adequately and timeously on whistle-blower complaints and internal investigation recommendations regarding senior executives implicated in irregular conduct, including former COO Tilayi (see Flag #1: Improper Appointments).²⁰
- In March and August 2020, the DPSA (a broad-based black economic empowerment group) submitted complaints to SAMSA's Board detailing maladministration and malfeasance committed by senior SAMSA managers and recommending disciplinary action. The DPSA also submitted their complaint to the Minister of Transport in March 2020, with follow-ups in October and November 2020. Both recipients ignored these complaints.²¹ In February 2021, the DPSA brought an application to the Pretoria High Court to compel the SAMSA Board to respond.²² The matter was not enrolled because the Board resolved in November 2021 to appoint a forensic investigator to examine the allegations. The forensic report, submitted in April 2022, found several allegations to be true and recommended disciplinary action against three senior SAMSA employees: COO Tilayi, Chief Human Capital Officer Mashishi and Company Secretary Raphadu. In April 2023, Raphadu was found guilty on three charges of misconduct, resulting in a recommendation for summary dismissal.²³ Mashishi's disciplinary process was finalised in March 2024, resulting in her dismissal.²⁴



Flag raised



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Under monitoring

Recommended Actions

	DUTY BEARER	ACTION(S)	ASSOCIATED FLAGS
1.	South African Maritime Safety Authority Board	Implement the AGSA's recommendations regarding consequence management and internal controls.	Flag #3: Climate of Fear or Favour Flag #5: Financial Malpractice



Flag raised



Flag lowered



Under monitoring

The 9 Flags

Flag #1

Improper Appointments

Improper appointments, dismissals or failure to remove individuals in senior positions may be used to drive a corrupt agenda.

Flag #2

Co-opting Key Functions

Informal control may be established over critical functions within the institution to abuse them.

Flag #3

Climate of Fear or Favour

The working culture favours loyalty over duty; alignment with a corrupt agenda is rewarded, and resistance is punished.

Flag #4

Corrupt Awards

Contracts, licences, partnerships, loans and/or investments may be awarded irregularly and repeatedly benefit the same actors.

Flag #5

Financial Malpractice

The institution's financial management practices may be abused to advance a corrupt agenda.

Flag #6

Obstructing Accountability

The institution's internal operations might be deliberately obscured to hide potential misconduct.

Flag #7

Manipulating Perceptions

A public narrative that frames misconduct as innocence may be promoted.

Flag #8

Private Gain

Illicit gains may be distributed to benefit the same actors.

Flag #9

Shadow Network

The same public and private actors may collude to gain control over an institution's assets and functions, benefiting repeatedly.

About ACTis

What is ACTis?

The Anti-Corruption Tracker Information System is an initiative of the Anti-Corruption and Accountability Project at the Institute for Security Studies. It provides analysis on corruption and state capture in South Africa, to inform early intervention and enforcement. It utilises a system of indicators and an AI-driven data-collection and analysis tool, validated by human experts. It identifies risks within individual government institutions and produces actionable recommendations to address them, with a view to disrupting patterns of state capture and corruption.

Findings are shared directly with government and other duty-bearers, civil society organisations, the media and the public, empowering authorities to intervene, strengthening accountability, and enabling citizens activism.

Links to ACTis Information:

Further project information may be found at the following links:

[Terms and Definitions](#)

[Project Methodology and Analytical Framework](#)

[About the Anti-Corruption and Accountability project](#)

[About the Institute for Security Studies](#)

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Flag raised



Flag lowered



Under monitoring

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