

About the Institution

The South African National Roads Agency (SANRAL) is a state-owned enterprise and major public entity responsible for financing, managing and maintaining South Africa’s national road network. SANRAL works closely with contractors, concessionaires and public-private partners to deliver road infrastructure projects. SANRAL reports to the Minister of Transport and the Board serves as its accounting authority. SANRAL is funded by both levies and the fiscus, with a reported expenditure of R41bn in 2024/25.¹

Flag Status

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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 three flags for SANRAL.
 - Repeated suspensions and reinstatements of senior executives without public explanation, prolonged vacancies in senior executive roles, and limited professional civil engineering expertise on the 2026 Board raise concerns about oversight quality and stability. Many of the same concerns existed under the previous Board. Weakened leadership can reduce institutional resilience and increase opportunities for undue influence over high-risk functions such as procurement and financial management.
 - Irregularities in high-value contract awards, including repeated awards to the same
- suppliers, may be systemic. This may be linked to instability and uncertain leadership quality at SANRAL, as well as the Board’s role in approving, denying or transferring contract awards.

 - Exposés by investigative journalists, whistleblowers or competitor suppliers’ lawsuits are revealing irregular contract awards and triggering investigations, adding to concerns that SANRAL’s procurement governance has weakened.
 - SANRAL is also showing signs of resilience, including an unqualified audit opinion, commissioning its own investigations, and



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taking legal action relating to certain disputed contracts.

- The impact of less technically qualified leadership is evident in a worrying weakness

in monitoring performance within road asset infrastructure management in 2024/25, a key part of its mandate.

Findings

Flag #1

Improper Appointments



The flag is raised because of concerns about multiple senior leadership appointments.

- The previous SANRAL Board (in place from August 2018 to February 2026) suspended Chief Procurement Officer (CPO) Dr Khomotso Mhelembe and Chief Audit Executive Zolisa Zwakala in late October 2025, but lifted the suspensions in November 2025. The Board refused to disclose the reasons for either suspension or why they were lifted, citing confidentiality.² Mhelembe had only been in her newly created post for about a year.³ SANRAL's Head of Supply Chain Management, Inba Thumbiran, resigned in July 2024 after being suspended in August 2023 and waiting a year for her disciplinary process to be finalised.⁴
- Mhelembe and two general managers who reported to her were placed under precautionary suspension again in April 2026.⁵
- In February 2026, SANRAL appointed Pretty Nozipho Makukule as Chief Financial Officer (CFO). The CFO post had been vacant since former CFO Inge Mulder left in July 2024. Mulder had been on leave for almost a year following her suspension alongside Thumbiran in August 2023.⁶
- SANRAL appointed a new Board on 1 March 2026. Aside from representatives from the National Treasury and the Department of Transport, only one Board member has engineering expertise, underscoring a deficiency in core sector expertise. The previous Board, on which most members had sat for at least two terms, also lacked civil engineering expertise.⁷
- Reginald Demana, appointed SANRAL Chief Executive Officer (CEO) in January 2023, resigned effective 31 August 2026. He said his resignation was not in response to the ongoing contract issues facing SANRAL.⁸ However, industry analysts said they are not surprised by his resignation, given the number of procurement irregularities during his tenure.⁹
 - Lehlohonolo Memeza, who also serves as SANRAL's Chief Corporate Affairs Officer, was appointed acting CEO in July 2026.



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Flag #4

Corrupt Awards



The flag is raised because indications suggest related suppliers were repeatedly and irregularly awarded contracts.

- In 2022, the Development Bank of South Africa (DBSA) reinstituted a tender process for SANRAL that had been cancelled by the then-SANRAL Board under controversial circumstances (see ACTis DBSA Report).
 - SANRAL had a long-standing policy that the consultants who design and draw up the specifications for a project also participate in the technical evaluation of bids for that project. In 2020, the SANRAL Board overturned this policy, arguing that it amounted to a conflict of interest. At the time, only one Board member had a civil engineering degree, and none had procurement expertise.¹⁰
 - The main professional organisations in the civil engineering industry – including the South African Forum of Civil Engineering Contractors, Consulting Engineers South Africa (CESA) and the South African Institution of Civil Engineering – protested that this went against long-established international best practice.¹¹ They argued that the Owner's Engineer – an independent civil engineering consultant who is hired to take responsibility for designing a project and drawing up its technical specifications – should assist with the technical evaluation of bids to ensure they meet the required specifications. The Owner's Engineer should also conduct site evaluations during construction, which requires knowledge and experience of the original design specifications to evaluate whether the project is being constructed properly.¹² According to CESA, many other public entities in South Africa abide by the principle of design engineers being involved in technical evaluations and site visits, who are all governed by the same governance and accountability considerations, and none has, to date, been flagged by the Auditor-General of South Africa (AGSA) for this practice.¹³
 - In May 2022, the SANRAL Board cancelled four original tenders for high-value road and bridge contracts because it claimed SANRAL's executive management did not adhere to the Board's resolution requiring that all tenders over R1bn be evaluated by a different group of consulting engineers than those who designed the tender.¹⁴
- The DBSA's Bid Adjudication Committee (BAC) allowed the SANRAL Board to interfere in their tender process.
 - The DBSA's Technical Evaluation Committee initially recommended disqualifying two Chinese-led joint ventures (JV), the China Communications Construction Company and MECSA JV, and the Base Major-China State Construction Engineering Corporation (CSCEC) JV. The SANRAL Board overruled this recommendation. The DBSA's BAC accepted the Board's decision and judged the two joint ventures the winners of three high-value tenders in November 2022. The SANRAL Board's involvement meant the process's outcome was not independent.¹⁵
- In April 2024, the Organisation Undoing Tax Abuse (OUTA) lodged a complaint against SANRAL over the legality of a R4.7bn contract award in May 2023 to upgrade a 5.74 km



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section of the N3 highway in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), awarded to the Aqua Transport/EXR JV. Aqua Transport's directors reportedly face fraud, theft and corruption charges, with one arrested in September 2022.¹⁶ Although SANRAL says it was legally obliged to award the tender, OUTA believes the charges should have disqualified the Aqua Transport/EXR JV.¹⁷ OUTA cited the Pretoria High Court's overturning of Transnet's contract award to Aqua Transport in April 2024 to support its argument.¹⁸

- OUTA initially requested the contract information through a Promotion of Access to Information Act (PAIA) request in June 2023, which SANRAL partially refused, citing third-party consent and commercial sensitivity. The courts upheld SANRAL's refusal to produce the information in November 2023.¹⁹ OUTA is pursuing the matter further.
- In 2025, a whistleblower reportedly raised allegations about a SANRAL contract awarded to the Base Major-CSCEC JV in November 2024. KZN Member of the Executive Council for Transport Siboniso Duma instructed Sma Ngubo, acting Head of the KZN Department of Transport, to investigate.²⁰
 - An internal SANRAL investigation launched in February 2025 found significant procedural and procurement irregularities in the November 2024 appointment of the Base Major-CSCEC JV to work on the R1.57bn Masekwaspoort Road project.²¹ The investigation was finalised in September 2025. In November 2025, SANRAL applied to the High Court of Pretoria to set aside the contract award and restart the tender process. The outcome of this application is unknown.²²
 - The Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB) confirmed that Base Major Construction's registration was suspended days before SANRAL awarded the contract to the Base Major-CSCEC JV in November 2024.²³ CIDB registration is mandatory for SANRAL construction tenders.²⁴
 - KZN ActionSA Provincial Chairperson Zwakele Mncwango said whistleblowers warned about the JV before it won the contract, citing corruption allegations. These warnings were largely ignored.²⁵
 - SANRAL's suspended CPO, Mhelembe, allegedly withheld key bid evaluation reports and revised recommendations from the Bid Evaluation Committee and the Board.²⁶ The Base Major-CSCEC JV also failed to demonstrate its required past performance, relying on the fact that Base Major Construction was an existing SANRAL supplier.²⁷
 - In November 2025, Minister of Transport Barbara Creecy acknowledged that the Department of Transport knew the uMngeni-uThukela Water Board intended to blacklist CSCEC and Base Major Construction. She reported that investigations were underway to determine future interactions with the JV and confirmed that SANRAL had approached the High Court to set the tender aside.²⁸
 - In 2023, Base Major Construction was implicated in contract irregularities when the Independent Development Trust (IDT) awarded the company a contract on behalf of



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the National Department of Health to refurbish the OR Tambo Memorial Hospital (see the ACTis IDT Report).²⁹

- In February 2026, SANRAL reported that Malachi Incorporated was investigating multiple award contracts to a single contractor who continually failed to complete projects. The contractor has not been named, and the investigation is ongoing.³⁰
- SANRAL faces legal action over procurement irregularities linked to Routine Road Maintenance (RRM) tenders.
 - In 2024, SANRAL issued a tender to establish a new panel of 20 contractors for RRM projects worth R9.5bn.³¹ The tender aimed to streamline procurement by reducing the number of RRM contractors from the 251 contractors previously used for various projects. SANRAL argued this would rationalise maintenance projects and help complete them faster. In 2025, 20 service providers were recommended for appointment to the panel for five years.³²
 - Unsuccessful bidders BCB Solutions (Pty) Ltd and Botle Ba Afrika Roads (Pty) Ltd argued the tender process was flawed, lacked transparency and suffered from serious irregularities during evaluation and adjudication. They brought two review applications against the panel appointment to the Pretoria High Court, which ruled the tender and appointment process unconstitutional and unlawful.³³
 - SANRAL conceded the case after receiving legal advice, set aside the panel appointments and returned to procuring contractors and consultants through individual open tenders.³⁴ As a result, SANRAL has extended existing RRM contracts until November 2026, while it works to appoint new service providers.³⁵
 - The 20 recommended panel members objected to the tender being set aside. Some are threatening legal action and criminal referrals, accusing SANRAL of colluding with previously used contractors.³⁶
 - Former CEO Demana said prima facie information pointed to possible fraud at SANRAL. This included some of the RRM panel contracts being awarded to seemingly non-existent companies or firms with untraceable contact details, as well as serious irregularities in bid specification, evaluation and adjudication processes.³⁷
 - The Directorate for Priority Crime Investigations (DPCI) have subpoenaed tender documents from SANRAL in its investigation into RRM contracts and tenders issued in the past 15 years, across nine construction companies. Former CEO Demana has been named in the investigation.³⁸
 - Disputes have also arisen between the new SANRAL Board, the CEO's office, and the Supply Chain Management (SCM) office over RRM contracts, particularly the temporary extension of existing contracts.
 - In February 2026, SANRAL commissioned an external law firm to investigate allegations of possible fraud. The allegations included that RRM contracts were



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issued to non-existent entities, and that certain staff failed to implement, intervened in or obstructed Board-approved decisions while the CEO was on leave.³⁹

- SANRAL has suspended and initiated disciplinary processes against three SCM officials for gross misconduct and insubordination, mainly because they refused to cooperate with the Board-sanctioned investigation. These employees are challenging their suspension in the Labour Court.⁴⁰

Flag #5

Financial Malpractice



The flag is raised due to detected deficiencies in internal controls.

- SANRAL reported an expected credit loss of R29bn from unpaid e-toll payments in 2024/25. The AGSA reported this as a material impairment due to the significant financial loss, although it reiterated that the loss was expected.⁴¹
- In 2024/25, the AGSA identified weaknesses in internal controls relating to performance monitoring, particularly in road asset infrastructure management.⁴²

Flag #6

Obstructing Accountability

Factors indicating resilience have been detected under this flag.

- The AGSA gave SANRAL an unqualified audit opinion in 2024/25.⁴³



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Recommended Actions

	DUTY BEARER	ACTION(S)	ASSOCIATED FLAGS
1.	Portfolio Committee on Transport	- Require SANRAL's acting CEO and CFO to account for procurement controversies, including the Base Major-CSCEC contracts and the cancellation of the R9.5bn RRM panel contracts. - Require SANRAL to disclose all the contracts awarded to CSCEC and Base Major Construction. - Request periodic updates on all ongoing forensic investigations and litigation concerning major procurement matters. - Require SANRAL to disclose the name of the contractor Malachi is investigating. - Require the Department of Transport to share the main findings of investigations into CSCEC by the KZN Department of Transport and by SANRAL. - Request justification from the Minister of Transport for why there is a lack of civil engineering expertise on SANRAL's Board and request that steps be taken to rectify this lack of expertise.	Flag #1: Improper Appointments Flag #4: Corrupt Awards
2.	Department of Transport	- Publicly release the main findings of both the KZN Department of Transport and SANRAL's forensic investigation into the CSCEC contract. - Review whether SANRAL's procurement controls relating to bidder eligibility, panel appointments and contract oversight comply with public procurement prescripts and good practice.	Flag #4: Corrupt Awards Flag #5: Financial Malpractice
3.	Special Investigating Unit	Apply for a mandate to investigate all high-value SANRAL contracts involving companies mentioned in this report.	Flag #4: Corrupt Awards
4.	Civil society	Continue using PAIA requests, court processes and public-interest monitoring to obtain information on high-value SANRAL infrastructure contracts where procurement concerns have been raised.	Flag #6: Obstructing Accountability



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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 #4

Corrupt Awards

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

Flag #7

Manipulating Perceptions

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

Flag #2

Co-opting Key Functions

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

Flag #5

Financial Malpractice

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

Flag #8

Private Gain

Illicit gains may be distributed to benefit the same actors.

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 #6

Obstructing Accountability

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

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](#)

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