

MEDIA RELEASE

Waste picker integration in South Africa takes significant step forward

Johannesburg, 19 August 2025: The Paper and Packaging PRO Alliance is pleased to announce the relaunch of the upgraded South African Waste Pickers Registration System (SAWPRS).

SAWPRS is the national Government-initiated waste picker registration database that is integral to ensuring that waste pickers and their informal collection systems are fully integrated into the country's formal recycling value chain and to substantially expand the collection of recyclables.

“It has been a long and difficult journey to rectify the technical challenges that were encountered with the initial version of SAWPRS, which did not properly provide for the mammoth task of linking thousands of buy back centre point-of-sale transactions to registered waste pickers and enabling the associated service fee payments,” explains Bhavesh Patel, Executive Director of the PRO Alliance. “Multiple stakeholders have been involved in reaching this point and our gratitude extends to all, but a special acknowledgement must go to our partner waste picker organisations – the African Reclaimers Organisation (ARO) and the South African Waste Pickers Association (SAWPA) – whose determination and perseverance helped drive the project forward.”

Improved collaboration between the various stakeholders, including the waste picker organisations, the PROs, Government, non-government and private entities, as well as expert input, access to critical system components, and the focused attention of a dedicated task team led by the PRO Alliance, have enabled the development of the new system in a very short space of time. The focus in recent weeks has been on training the waste picker organisations, facilitating SAWPRS registration drives across the country and rebuilding the credibility of SAWPRS nationally.

The PRO-Alliance-led BBC 200 Project is a multi-stakeholder national initiative intended to accelerate the integration of waste pickers into South Africa's formal waste economy. The project uses the newly developed SAWPRS platform to ensure registration on the national database, and with the assistance of a transactional platform and a cashless payment solution, will record auditable transactions and enable payment of service fees.

From June 2025 to the end of 2026, the aim is to digitally onboard around 200 BBCs nationally, thus enabling the payment of the service fee to approximately 80 000 waste pickers through a cashless, auditable payment system. The first significant milestone, 50 BBCs onboarded by the end of 2025 and 20 000 waste pickers registered, will prove the success of the first phase of the project and will guarantee funding from the member Producer Responsibility Organisations (PROs) for the second phase.

Further, for the first time, PROs will have access to real-time reporting on materials, volumes, and payments and will ease the administrative burden on the organisations through automation and system compliance.

While the challenges with the first version of SAWPRS were being addressed, the PROs – who ultimately hold the responsibility for recycling their end-of-life paper and packaging products - continued with their own projects to drive recycling and pay waste picker service fees, delivering on the requirements of the Extended Producer Responsibility legislation. A separate but parallel project will ensure that the registrations from these individual programmes are brought into SAWPRS so that going forward there is one auditable source of information on waste picker integration nationwide.

A dedicated project team meets weekly to address any challenges and maintain focus on the digitisation of the targeted BBCs to enable waste picker registrations on SAWPRS, provide an auditable trace of transactions at BBC level and enable live service fee payments to waste pickers through a cashless payment solution. The team also develops plans that will collaboratively help drive awareness, education and registration of waste pickers.

To further enhance these efforts and drive waste picker integration, PRO Alliance members and other critical stakeholders participate in the Waste Picker Integration Working Committee which considers innovative ways to support waste pickers and to create an inclusive waste economy, under the leadership of Kishan Singh, the Chief Executive Officer of MetPac-SA, who has extensive experience in waste management and recycling,

“We acknowledge that the technical challenges have disrupted the pace of progress, and we regret the impact on our stakeholders, however, we are confident that, with a fully functioning registration system and the ongoing support of our PRO members, we can accelerate the registration and payment of waste pickers to achieve the ambitious targets we have set ourselves for the next two years,” adds Patel.

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NOTE TO EDITORS:

About PRO Alliance

The Paper and Packaging PRO Alliance exists to facilitate collaboration by producer responsibility organisations (PROs) on matters regarding the EPR regulations and areas of mutual interest and benefit, such as legislative reform and advocacy, waste picker integration, municipal infrastructure, governance and compliance, and stakeholder engagement.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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