

FOREWORD

South Africa is entering the new millennium with a combination of immense challenges and great opportunities. The opening of its society to equality of opportunity for all its citizens has also widened its access to the world stage and its potential to be a respected global citizen. Ironically, the world stage also throws up many of the challenges that nations like South Africa now face.

Globalisation of trade, for example, provides both opportunities for South Africa's industries and threats to its aspirations to develop existing and new businesses in a world that is highly competitive for development capital and for the services of talented individuals.

The world community is also placing greater expectations on individual countries to be environmentally responsible, not only for their own citizens, but also for the world at large. These global factors are placing greater demands on the capabilities of economies to demonstrate that they have the technical infrastructure to earn the respect of the international community when their products reach their markets, when they participate in world debates on global warming, environment protection, community health issues etc, or when they compete for establishment of new industries requiring a solid domestic technical capability to underpin their success.

An essential but often invisible factor in the successful development and operation of an economy is an effective Standards, Quality Assurance, Accreditation and Metrology (SQAM) infrastructure. Society rarely sees or acknowledges that everyday life is affected by the availability of community standards for the essentials of its life, for its food, its roads, its bridges, its buildings, the safety of its products, the quality of the environment, the credibility of its judicial systems, the effectiveness of the public health system, the defence, transport, communications, energy supply services, and the success of export industries, plus numerous other features of life.

While standards describe the basic requirements for a society's needs, those requirements need to be competently measured and those measurements need to be compatible with a country's trading partners. Consumers also need to be confident that the goods they purchase are fairly measured, safe for use and of appropriate quality for their needs. Accreditation is available to provide independent, objective reassurance that the organisations supplying goods and services, and those testing and measuring them, are competent and credible.

The review of the South African SQAM infrastructure provides a timely opportunity to assess the resources available in South Africa to support its industries and its citizens for both its

current needs and those of the future. The review has been structured to capture the needs of South Africa's SQAM stakeholders, including consumers, industry (both large and small), government, and the institutions comprising the standards, quality, accreditation and metrology infrastructure. It has also examined the effectiveness and relevance of the technical regulatory regime in South Africa and its impact on competitiveness of industry and protection of public health and safety.

Governments also have a community responsibility to support their technical infrastructures for those activities which are performed in the public interest, and this review has included a detailed consideration of a number of related issues in a number of foreign countries, selected for close study.

While international trends are useful, at the end of the day a SQAM must satisfy the special needs of the country and culture within which it operates. It is hoped that the recommendations arising from this review will well serve South Africa for its future development and aspirations.