Keynote address of Acting Commissioner Hardin Ratshisusu at the 2026 Plumbing Conference, Marks Park Sports Club, Emmarentia, Randburg, 23 July 2026

Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Good morning.

It is a great honour to participate in this event of stakeholders that most households constantly call upon, either when starting a construction project, doing any maintenance, or in an emergency.

When your Chairperson, Ms Lea Smith, reached out to us last year, I immediately got a sense that this is a stakeholder we should be closely working with.

I therefore thank you for the invitation to address you this morning on a matter that is of critical importance to consumers, industry, and the broader built environment.

My address, in keeping with the theme of the conference – *Compliance, Competence, Confidence* – will focus on compliance within the plumbing industry and the need to ensure consumer safety.

The theme of this conference weaves three concepts that are closely connected. Compliance strengthens competence, competence builds trust, and together these create consumer confidence.

In this vein, the importance of compliant and safe plumbing products cannot be overemphasised, and as such there should be consequences for firms that supply non-compliant products and substandard services.

Distinguished delegates, plumbing is not just about pipes, fittings, installations, and technical services, it is also directly connected to the realisation of fundamental socio-economic rights to dignity as it helps fulfil the basic requirement of a habitable shelter.

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa protects important socio-economic rights, including the right to adequate housing and the right of access to sufficient food and water.

These rights cannot be meaningfully realised without reliable water services, appropriate sanitation, and functional plumbing infrastructure.

The Consumer Protection Act 68 of 2008 (Consumer Protection Act) identifies various ways in which the social and economic welfare of consumers can be promoted and advanced.

Plumbing is also closely connected to consumer protection because the industry involves both goods and services.

Consumers purchase plumbing products and components, while at the same time relying on professionals to install, maintain, repair, or replace those products.

In this regard, the Consumer Protection Act provides an important framework for protecting consumers, particularly consumers' right to fair value, good quality, and safety.

When plumbing products do not meet the required standards, or when services are performed poorly, the consequences can be dire and costly to the consumer.

The result may be defects, product failure, or damage to homes and buildings. In more serious cases, consumers may be exposed to personal injury.

These are not risks that a responsible regulator and industry can afford to ignore. There can be no room for wilful blindness when consumer safety is at stake.

For the National Consumer Commission, the Consumer Protection Act provides a legal framework which seeks, among other objectives, to promote and advance the social and economic welfare of consumers in South Africa, particularly vulnerable consumers.

These consumers are often the most affected when products fail, when services are performed poorly, or when suppliers do not provide adequate information.

It is therefore important that consumer protection is not viewed as the responsibility of regulators alone.

It requires a partnership between regulators, industry bodies, professionals, manufacturers, suppliers, and consumers.

There are provisions of the Consumer Protection Act that provide protection for consumers regarding safe and quality goods or services, that are worth mentioning.

Section 54 provides important standards relating to the performance of services and requires services to be performed in a manner and at a level of quality that consumers are generally entitled to expect.

In simple terms, the expectation is that suppliers must provide services that are performed properly, competently, and within the required and promised timeframe.

On the other hand, Section 55 provides that consumers are entitled to goods that are - reasonably suitable for the purposes for which they are generally intended; of good quality

and in good working order, free from defects; usable and durable for a reasonable period, taking into account their normal use and the circumstances in which they were supplied; and comply with applicable standards and public regulations.

Other provisions of the Consumer Protection Act provide that consumers are entitled to the proper use, installation, and delivery of goods that are free from defects. There is also an obligation on service providers to perform and complete services in a timely manner.

All these provisions are particularly relevant to the plumbing industry, including suppliers of plumbing products.

Plumbing emergencies are not planned. They often occur at the most inconvenient times and can result in significant consequential damage if they are not attended to promptly.

For instance, a burst pipe, blocked drainage system, major leak, or defective installation can quickly cause damage to property and disrupt the lives of consumers.

Where products are defective, unsafe, or do not meet the applicable standards, the consequences can extend far beyond the individual product itself.

They can affect buildings, homes, businesses, and communities.

The plumbing industry operates within a technical environment where standards play an essential role in ensuring safety, quality, and reliability.

Standards are pivotal to consumer protection.

It is encouraging that the Institute of Plumbing of South Africa (IOPSA) and the Plumbing Industry Registration Board strive to comply with these standards. The National Consumer Commission is encouraged by these efforts.

I am also aware of the application by your organisation to be accredited as a Consumer Group in terms of Section 78 of the Consumer Protection Act.

I have particularly noted the emphasis placed on proactive auditing and compliance monitoring as well as consumer education and advocacy.

These areas are closely aligned with the priorities of the National Consumer Commission. It is in this context that we will be publishing the accreditation of the Plumbing Industry Registration Board as a Consumer Group.

Consumer protection must be a shared responsibility. Where regulators and industry work together transparently, problems can be identified earlier, risks can be mitigated, and consumers can be protected more effectively.

It is in recognition of this need for collaboration that on 15 December 2025 the United Nations General Assembly adopted Principles for Consumer Product Safety to promote product safety at a global level.

These principles provide a framework for product safety for governments, businesses, and civil society.

South Africa alongside Brazil, Costa Rica, Peru, Spain, and Sweden sponsored the resolution to adopt the United Nations Principles for Consumer Product Safety, and negotiations ensued at the Intergovernmental Group of Experts meetings and subsequent review conference at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

UNCTAD estimates that 44% of United Nations Member States lack sufficient legal frameworks for product safety, placing a significant number of consumers worldwide at risk.

South Africa can be a pioneer for product safety.

The plumbing industry can lead the way, and such can provide a concrete example of the collaboration between government and consumer groups to promote product safety.

The National Consumer Commission looks forward to engaging with the plumbing industry on measures to protect consumers from unsafe plumbing products and poor-quality service.

While the Consumer Protection Act provides certain protections to consumers, the National Consumer Commission encourages the industry to consider warranty arrangements that appropriately reflect the expected lifespan and nature of plumbing products, beyond the legislated requirement of six months provided for under Section 56.

The National Consumer Commission envisages a mutually beneficial and sustainable partnership with the plumbing industry in at least two key areas - market monitoring and compliance inspections; and consumer advocacy, education, and awareness.

Through these areas of collaboration, we can strengthen compliance and competence across the industry.

We can also work together to ensure that consumers are better informed about their rights and responsibilities.

Ultimately, the objective should be to create an environment in which consumers can purchase plumbing products and engage plumbing professionals with confidence.

As I conclude, I encourage the plumbing industry to embrace a culture of transparency, accountability, continuous improvement, and proactive compliance.

There should be no shame in recalling defective, unsafe, or sub-standard goods. A responsible industry does not hide problems. It identifies them, addresses them, learns from them, and protect consumers.

Let us therefore work together to ensure that compliance is not simply a regulatory obligation, but a shared commitment to meaningful consumer protection.

Let us build an industry where competence is valued, where consumers are protected, and where confidence is earned through consistent delivery of safe, quality, and reliable products and services.

Thank you.