



PRESS RELEASE

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Coaltech brings its mining and processing research under one roof to sharpen innovation across the coal value chain

Johannesburg, Gauteng, South Africa, 17 July 2026. The Coaltech Research Association has merged its Mining, including Geosciences, and Coal Processing research portfolios into a single structure, the Integrated Mining and Processing (IMP) Research Focus Area. For the members, host institutions and researchers who fund and deliver Coaltech's work, the change means one coordinated research pipeline across the full coal value chain, from run of mine through to processed product, and a clearer line of sight from every rand of research spend to the result it is meant to produce.

South Africa's coal producers are working against a tougher cost base than most of their global peers, with rising energy and logistics costs, safety stoppages that halt production, and growing liabilities tied to fine coal and discard dumps. Research that treats mining and processing as separate problems tends to leave value stranded at the boundary between them, which is precisely where many of the sector's efficiency, safety and waste challenges actually sit. Integrating the two portfolios lets Coaltech follow the ore across that boundary and back the work that moves the whole chain, rather than one link at a time.

In practical terms, members now engage one focus area instead of two. There is a single combined project pipeline, one prioritisation process, and one point of contact for the research they invest in. Duplication at the overlap between mining and processing falls away, decisions on what to fund get faster, and the Association can concentrate its budget on the projects with the clearest return for the sector. To keep the technical depth of each discipline intact, the IMP Research Focus Area runs two dedicated technical streams.

The Mining stream carries the questions that shape safer, more productive operations: human factors in the shift toward autonomous mining, real time equipment monitoring, drilling, blasting and fragmentation control, predictive safety technologies, roof control and geotechnical engineering, dust management, remining of old workings, and drones for underground safety. The Coal Processing stream carries the questions that decide how much value the sector recovers from what it mines: the production and handling of fines, plant energy efficiency, wet and dry processing, digitalisation and online measurement, and the repurposing and monetisation of discards, ash dumps and other processing waste.

The IMP Research Focus Area is chaired by Gavin Silver. Teboho Dibate serves as Vice Chairperson for the Mining stream, and Vicky van Schalkwyk serves as Vice Chairperson for the Coal Processing stream. The Focus Area reports to the Coaltech Board.

In a related leadership change, Sandra Magagula moves to Coaltech's Future Technologies Research Focus Area, where she takes up the role of Vice Chairperson for Alternative Uses of Coal.

"Our members do not run a mine and a processing plant as two separate businesses, they run one value chain, and their research should be organised the same way," said Avhurengwi Nengovhela, Chief Executive Officer of Coaltech. "Bringing the two portfolios together lets us stop funding around the edges of a problem

and start funding the whole of it. The prize is sharper priorities, less duplicated spend, and research that shows up in safer, more efficient operations.”

The move sits within a clear position on the sector's future. Coal continues to carry a substantial share of South Africa's electricity, export earnings, employment and industrial activity, and it will do so for years yet. Coaltech's view is that this makes disciplined, well governed research more important, not less, because the gains in safety, efficiency and environmental performance that keep the sector competitive are exactly the gains that good research delivers.

“Coal is doing real work in this economy right now, and pretending otherwise helps no one,” Nengovhela added. “What we owe the sector is rigour: research that is prioritised well, delivered on time, and measured honestly. A single integrated focus area is how we lift that standard and give members more value for what they put in.”

The IMP Research Focus Area is operational now, with its combined pipeline overseen by one steering committee that meets at least every second month and reports to the Coaltech Board. Members and research partners with projects or proposals that span mining and processing can engage through a single point of contact from today.

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Media Contact: info@coaltech.co.za

About Coaltech Research Association

Coaltech Research Association is a voluntary collaborative non-profit organisation that addresses the research needs of South Africa's coal industry. Established with the primary goal of developing technologies and applying research findings, Coaltech aims to make the South African coal industry competitive, sustainable, and safe. The organisation brings together mining groups, researchers, academics, and government stakeholders to foster collaboration and innovation in the coal sector.