

## PCBL Limited

December 07, 2023

Facilities	Amount (₹ crore)	Ratings <sup>1</sup>	Rating Action
Long-term bank facilities	800.00	CARE AA (RWD)	Placed on Rating Watch with Developing Implications
Long-term / Short-term bank facilities	3,900.00	CARE AA / CARE A1+ (RWD)	Placed on Rating Watch with Developing Implications
Short-term bank facilities	100.00	CARE A1+ (RWD)	Placed on Rating Watch with Developing Implications

Details of facilities in Annexure-1.

### Rationale and key rating drivers

CARE Ratings Limited (CARE Ratings) has placed the ratings assigned to the bank facilities of PCBL Limited (PCBL; erstwhile Phillips Carbon Black Limited) on 'Rating watch with Developing Implications'.

The rating action follows the announcement of in-principle approval by the board of directors of PCBL for the acquisition of 100% equity stake in Aquapharm Chemicals Private Limited (ACPL), a specialty chemical company, on November 28, 2023. The transaction valuation is ₹3,800 crore, exact funding pattern of which is yet to be finalised.

CARE Ratings will engage with the company's management to understand the exact contours of the acquisition, such as ACPL's business risk profile and expected synergies from this acquisition, the exact source of funding for this transaction, and future investment plans, and will take a view on the ratings once the impact of the same on the credit risk profile of PCBL is clear.

The board of directors of PCBL had also accorded in-principle approval on November 29, 2023, for entering into a joint venture (JV) with Australia-based Kinaltek Pty Ltd (Kinaltek), with 51% stake in the JV company. PCBL will infuse USD 16 million in the JV company with further infusion of upto USD 28 million over a period of 2 years for setting up manufacturing facilities.

Both the above transactions are subject to the receipt of the required regulatory approvals. Any significant increase in debt level of PCBL (Consolidated) for funding these acquisitions, thereby impacting the capital structure and debt protection metrics of PCBL shall remain a key rating monitorable.

The ratings continue to draw comfort from the leadership position of PCBL in the domestic carbon black (CB) industry with satisfactory track record of operations, financial flexibility from being a part of the established RP-Sanjiv Goenka (RP-SG) group, strategic location of the plants, geographically diversified sales with strong presence in the export market and steady source of revenue from the power segment. The capital structure and debt coverage indicators of PCBL also continue to remain comfortable.

The ratings also factor in the healthy capacity utilisation and improvement in profit before interest, lease rentals, depreciation and taxation (PBILDT)/ton of CB sold in FY23 (refers to the period April 1 to March 31) and H1FY24 with improvement in operating efficiency, higher sales of specialty CB and increase in revenue and profitability from the power segment. With a large proportion of CB sales being made to tyre companies (around 70% in FY23) where the pricing is formula driven and linked to the movement in raw material prices, the company has been able to pass on the increase in the input prices to a large extent. Furthermore, the increase in the sales of specialty CB, which is a value-added product and commands higher margin has contributed to the increase in the spread.

The ratings take cognisance of completion of the large-size greenfield capex for CB capacity of 147,000 MTPA and 12 MW out of the proposed 24 MW captive power plant being implemented in Tamil Nadu through subsidiary, PCBL (TN) Ltd (rated 'CARE AA-; / CARE A1+ Rating watch with developing implications'). The first phase of the unit (63,000 MT) was commissioned in April 2023 and the second phase became operational in September 2023. Furthermore, the first phase (20,000 MTPA) of the brownfield specialty CB capacity expansion in Mundra by PCBL has also become operational in July 2023 with the second phase of similar capacity expected to be completed by Q1FY25. The capex is being funded out of a mix of external borrowings, internal accruals and equity raised in FY22. The company remains exposed to the inherent pre- and post-implementation risks associated with large-size projects.

PCBL continues to remain exposed to the risk of volatility in raw material and finished goods prices and exposure to foreign exchange fluctuation risk given the significant dependence on imported raw material. However, the raw material price fluctuation risk is mitigated to an extent due to the pricing formula linked to crude oil prices, though with a lag of about a quarter. Furthermore, the foreign exchange risk is mitigated by the natural hedge from exports and stringent hedging policy. The ratings remain further tempered by cyclicalities due to significant dependence on the fortunes of the tyre industry and threat of imports of CB.

<sup>1</sup>Complete definition of the ratings assigned are available at [www.careedge.in](http://www.careedge.in) and other CARE Ratings Ltd.'s publications

## Rating sensitivities: Factors likely to lead to rating actions

### Positive factors

- Sustained increase in the scale of operations, return indicators and business cash flows through higher share of specialty CB along with continued comfortable debt protection metrics.

### Negative factors

- Significant debt-laden acquisition leading to deterioration in the overall gearing ratio ( $>0.60x$ ) and/or debt coverage indicators - total debt to gross cash accruals (TD/GCA) ( $>3x$ ) and interest coverage ( $<10$ ) on a sustained basis.
- Any sharp deviation in the envisaged sales volumes or contribution having a significant bearing on the company's performance.
- Any regulatory change having the potential to materially impact the company's performance.
- Any sharp cost or time over-run in the projects under implantation having a bearing on the financial risk profile or liquidity profile of the company.

## Analytical approach: Consolidated

For arriving at the ratings, CARE Ratings has taken a consolidated approach of PCBL along with its subsidiaries due to strong operational and financial linkages between them. The list of companies being consolidated is given in **Annexure-6**.

## Detailed description of the key rating drivers:

### Key strengths

#### Leadership position in the domestic CB segment

PCBL commenced its operations from 1962 and has achieved leadership position in the domestic CB industry with its installed capacity gradually increasing from 14,000 MTPA to 666,000 MTPA. Furthermore, it has established a strong relationship with its customers.

#### Strong presence in the export market

PCBL is the largest exporter of CB from India having presence in more than 45 countries, though majority of the exports are to south-east Asian countries. The presence in the export market reduces the off-take risk in the event of a slowdown in the domestic market. In terms of volume, the share of exports was around 31% in FY23 as against 32% in FY22.

#### Healthy operating performance

The company booked improvement in the total operating income (TOI) in FY23 (30%) despite decline in the volume by 2% on account of growth in average realisations (32%). The growth in turnover was also driven by increase in the revenue from power segment by 53% on the back of increase in power tariff from ₹2.99/unit to ₹3.81 per unit. PBILDT/Ton of CB witnessed improvement in FY23 compared with FY22 on account of the increase in sales of specialty CB, improved operating efficiency and higher profitability from power sale.

In H1FY24, TOI witnessed a decline by 6.67% y-o-y despite an increase in the sales volume, on account of decline in realisations. PBILDT/tonne witnessed an increase which led to improved PBILDT margin in H1FY24 compared with H1FY23. Going forward, with the increase in the capacity of CB and specialty black, stable demand outlook and benefits derived from operational efficiencies, CARE Ratings expects operating profitability to remain healthy.

#### Comfortable capital structure and debt protection metrics

The overall gearing of the company witnessed moderation from 0.38x as on March 31, 2022 to 0.50x as on March 31, 2023; however, it continued to remain comfortable. The moderation was on account of increase in the term debt for funding capex requirements as well as higher working capital borrowings as on March 31, 2023. The interest coverage ratio, though moderated, continued to remain comfortable at 13.88x in FY23 (24.12x in FY22).

With increase in the total debt, TD/GCA witnessed deterioration from 1.83x as on March 31, 2022 to 2.55x as on March 31, 2023, though continuing to remain comfortable.

CARE Ratings will continue to monitor any significant increase in the debt for funding the ongoing acquisitions, thereby impacting the capital structure and debt protection metrics.

#### Steady source of revenue from the power segment

PCBL has captive power plants aggregating to 98 MW at its manufacturing facilities. The power produced over and above the captive requirement is sold and adds to the overall contribution per ton of CB produced. In FY23, while power segment contributed to only around 3.67% of PCBL's operating income (as against 2.09% in FY22), its contribution to overall profit

before interest and taxes (PBIT) was significant at around 15.98% in FY23 (13.32% in FY22). PCBL does not have any power purchase agreement (PPA) for off-take of power; however, it enters into medium-term agreements for the same. Power generated as well as power sold outside witnessed an improvement in FY23 over FY22, mainly on account of increase in the production of CB which led to higher generation of off gas/tail gas leading to higher generation of power.

### **Strategic location of the plant**

The manufacturing units of PCBL are situated in different parts of India, close to the ports (for import of raw material and export of CB) and near major tyre manufacturing hubs. Its location facilitates PCBL in optimising transportation cost. Moreover, the greenfield project at Tamil Nadu would also add to the locational advantage as plants of major tyre companies are situated in southern India.

### **Part of strong promoter group**

PCBL is a part of the RP-Sanjeev Goenka Group of Kolkata which has interests across diverse business segments, such as power, carbon black, retail, education, BPO, media & entertainment, tea and rubber plantations and sports. The other major companies of the group include CESC Limited (rated 'CARE AA; Negative/CARE A1+'), Haldia Energy Limited (rated 'CARE AA-; Negative/CARE A1+'), Saregama India Limited (rated 'CARE AA-; Stable/CARE A1+') and Noida Power Company Ltd. Being part of a large established group provides significant financial flexibility to PCBL.

### **Favourable industry prospects**

The demand for CB remains favourable with stable demand from the tyre segment, especially replacement market and due to capacity additions planned by the tyre companies. The demand for specialty black has also been witnessing an increase. The supply disruptions from China and Russia have benefitted the domestic manufacturers.

### **Liquidity: Strong**

The liquidity position of the company remains strong on the back of strong internal accruals with respect to financial obligations along with free cash, bank and liquid investments of ₹127 crore as on September 30, 2023. The company has scheduled debt repayment obligation of ₹129 crore in FY24 (including repayment obligation of term loan drawn in April 2023) alongside planned pre-payment of ₹20.75 crore in FY24, against which it is expected to generate sufficient cash accruals. With a gearing of 0.50x as on March 31, 2023, PCBL has sufficient gearing headroom to raise additional debt for its capex. The liquidity is also supported by unutilised lines of working capital limit, where average utilisation stood at 41% for sanctioned fund-based limits of ₹750 crore during the last 12 months ended April 2023. Apart from the secured working capital limits of ₹3,000 crore, PCBL has access to unsecured limits of ₹1,800 crore at standalone level from various lenders. However, it has a policy to restrict the utilisation to ₹3,000 crore. The company also enjoys financial flexibility by virtue of it being part of the RP-SG group.

### **Key weaknesses**

#### **Profitability susceptible to volatility in raw material prices and foreign exchange fluctuations**

Carbon Black Feedstock (CBFS) is the key raw material for carbon black, accounting for around 83% of PCBL's cost of sales in FY23. CBFS is a derivative product of crude oil refining having strong correlation with crude oil prices and exhibits volatility. However, a significant portion of the sales of PCBL is to the tyre segment which operates as per pricing formulae, thereby reducing volatility in profits, if sales volumes are maintained. Although favourable demand-supply dynamics in the CB industry is envisaged to benefit PCBL in the short-term, sustained high prices of crude oil leading to inflationary pressure could impact demand in the medium-term. PCBL sourced 90% of its raw material requirement (CBFS) through imports, whereas it exported around 30% of its gross sales in FY23. Being a net importer, PCBL is exposed to the risk of having foreign currency payables. CARE Ratings notes that exposure to the volatility in profits on account of foreign currency fluctuation is reduced to a certain extent, as PCBL hedges most of its net forex exposure at all points of time as articulated by the company management.

#### **Dependence on the fortunes of the cyclical tyre industry**

A major portion of PCBL's revenue is from sale of CB to tyre manufacturers, in line with the overall application of CB produced across the globe. More than 70% of CB is used for tyre manufacturing, which leads to PCBL's dependence on the fortunes of the tyre industry, which in turn is dependent on the cyclical auto industry. Tyre industry caters to the original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) as well as the replacement market. Around 60% of the total tyre industry sales are to the replacement market which provides support during cyclical auto sector downturns. Although degrowth in auto sales has the potential to impact the future replacement market, the replacement market sales support the overall tyre sales.

Furthermore, PCBL has also been increasing its presence in the specialty black range which caters to diversified industries - paints, inks, plastics, etc. It operates research and development (R&D) centres in Palej (Gujarat) and Belgium where one of

the objectives is to grow its portfolio in specialty black.

### Inherent project risk associated with large-size ongoing projects

CB capacity of 147,000 MTPA and 12 MW out of the proposed 24-MW captive power plant implemented in Tamil Nadu through subsidiary, PCBL (TN) Ltd (rated 'CARE AA-; / CARE A1+; Rating watch with developing implications') have been commissioned in phases. The first phase of the unit (63,000 MT) was commissioned in April 2023 and the second phase became operational in September 2023.

There was cost overrun in the project from the earlier estimate of ₹800 crore due to increase in the scope and the project is expected to cost around ₹950 crore (excluding GST component and margin money for working capital requirement) out of which ₹250 crore is funded through debt.

In addition, PCBL is increasing specialty black capacity by 40,000 MT, which will be done in two phases. 20,000 MT has been completed and is operational since July 2023, while the remaining will be completed in Q1FY25, at a total cost of about ₹350 crore. The expansion is proposed to be funded out of internal generations. The company remains exposed to the pre and post-implementation risks associated with the projects.

### Threat of imports of CB

Anti-dumping duty (ADD) which had been imposed on the import of CB (USD 397/MT from China and USD 36/MT from Russia) from November 2009 was removed in January 2021. As China accounts for a significant portion of the world's CB capacity and production, any Chinese demand-supply imbalance has the potential to impact market share and fortunes of domestic players. However, China majorly produces CB through the carbon black oil (CBO)/ coal tar route, the prices of which are higher than that of CBFS prices. Furthermore, CB prices in China have surged due to plant shutdowns caused by the Chinese government's intensifying environmental protection campaign. This apart, the imports from Russia have also been impacted due to the ongoing geo-political situation in the region.

### Environmental, social and governance (ESG) risks

The chemical manufacturing industry is subject to high environmental and safety concerns and PCBL is exposed to the changes in regulatory requirements for managing the same and potential shift of demand towards greener substitutes. The company undertakes various steps to minimise waste, conserve resources and undertakes continuous improvement of processes to protect the environment. All its plants are zero-discharge facilities and have been operating smoothly.

It spent ₹8.50 crore for various corporate social responsibility (CSR) projects and initiatives in FY23. 60% of the members of the board are independent directors.

### Applicable criteria

[Policy on default recognition](#)

[Consolidation](#)

[Financial Ratios – Non financial Sector](#)

[Liquidity Analysis of Non-financial sector entities](#)

[Rating Outlook and Credit Watch](#)

[Short Term Instruments](#)

[Manufacturing Companies](#)

[Policy on Withdrawal of Ratings](#)

### About the company and industry

#### Industry classification

Macro-economic Indicator	Sector	Industry	Basic Industry
Commodities	Chemicals	Chemicals & petrochemicals	Carbon black

PCBL, incorporated in 1960, is engaged in the manufacturing and sale of CB, which is mainly used in tyre and other rubber products. The company also produces specialty CB, which are used as pigmenting, UV stabilising and conductive agents in a variety of common and specialty products, including plastics, printing & packaging and coatings. PCBL is the largest producer of CB in the country and one of the largest players in the world, with an installed capacity of 666,000 MTPA of CB. It also has captive power plants (CPP) at all its locations (aggregate capacity of 98 MW). The company sells excess power generated after meeting its own requirement. Its plants are located at Durgapur (West Bengal), Mundra (Gujarat), Palej (Gujarat), Kochi (Kerala) and Chennai (Tamil Nadu). PCBL is managed under the stewardship of the Kolkata-based RP-SG group.

Brief Financials (₹ crore)	March 31, 2022 (A)	March 31, 2023 (A)	H1FY24 (UA)
Total operating income	4,468.22	5,790.42	2,834.23
PBILDT	677.77	741.24	448.89
PAT	427.14	442.19	232.18
Overall gearing (times)	0.30	0.50	NA
Interest coverage (times)	23.30	13.88	11.16

A: Audited UA: Unaudited NA: Not available; Note: 'the above results are latest financial results available'

**Status of non-cooperation with previous CRA:** Not applicable

**Any other information:** Not applicable

**Rating history for the last three years:** Please refer Annexure-2

**Covenants of the rated instruments/ facilities:** Detailed explanation of covenants of the rated instruments/facilities is given in Annexure-3

**Complexity level of the various instruments rated:** Annexure-4

**Lender details:** Annexure-5

#### Annexure-1: Details of instruments/facilities

Name of the Instrument	ISIN	Date of Issuance	Coupon Rate (%)	Maturity Date	Size of the Issue (₹ crore)	Rating Assigned along with Rating Outlook
Fund-based - LT-Cash credit		-	-	-	800.00	CARE AA (RWD)
Fund-based - ST-Working capital demand loan		-	-	-	100.00	CARE A1+ (RWD)
Fund-based/Non-fund-based-LT/ST		-	-	-	1190.00	CARE AA / CARE A1+ (RWD)
Non-fund-based - LT/ ST-BG/LC		-	-	-	2135.00	CARE AA / CARE A1+ (RWD)
Non-fund-based - LT/ ST-BG/LC		-	-	-	575.00	CARE AA / CARE A1+ (RWD)

#### Annexure-2: Rating history for the last three years

Sr. No.	Name of the Instrument/ Bank Facilities	Current Ratings			Rating History			
		Type	Amount Outstanding (₹ crore)	Rating	Date(s) and Rating(s) assigned in 2023-2024	Date(s) and Rating(s) assigned in 2022-2023	Date(s) and Rating(s) assigned in 2021-2022	Date(s) and Rating(s) assigned in 2020-2021
1	Commercial paper- Commercial paper (Standalone)	ST	-	-	-	-	1)Withdrawn (12-Apr-21)	1)CARE A1+ (23-Sep-20) 2)CARE A1+ (02-Jun-20)

Sr. No.	Name of the Instrument/ Bank Facilities	Current Ratings			Rating History			
		Type	Amount Outstanding (₹ crore)	Rating	Date(s) and Rating(s) assigned in 2023-2024	Date(s) and Rating(s) assigned in 2022-2023	Date(s) and Rating(s) assigned in 2021-2022	Date(s) and Rating(s) assigned in 2020-2021
2	Fund-based - LT-Cash credit	LT	800.00	CARE AA (RWD)	1)CARE AA; Stable (14-Sep-23) 2)CARE AA; Stable (07-Jul-23) 3)CARE AA; Stable (22-Jun-23)	1)CARE AA; Stable (05-Jul-22)	1)CARE AA; Stable (22-Jun-21)	1)CARE AA-; Stable (23-Sep-20)
3	Non-fund-based - LT/ST-BG/LC	LT/ST*	2135.00	CARE AA / CARE A1+ (RWD)	1)CARE AA; Stable / CARE A1+ (14-Sep-23) 2)CARE AA; Stable / CARE A1+ (07-Jul-23) 3)CARE AA; Stable / CARE A1+ (22-Jun-23)	1)CARE AA; Stable / CARE A1+ (05-Jul-22)	1)CARE AA; Stable / CARE A1+ (22-Jun-21)	1)CARE AA-; Stable / CARE A1+ (23-Sep-20)
4	Non-fund-based - LT/ST-BG/LC	LT/ST*	575.00	CARE AA / CARE A1+ (RWD)	1)CARE AA; Stable / CARE A1+ (14-Sep-23) 2)CARE AA; Stable / CARE A1+ (07-Jul-23) 3)CARE AA; Stable / CARE A1+ (22-Jun-23)	1)CARE AA; Stable / CARE A1+ (05-Jul-22)	1)CARE AA; Stable / CARE A1+ (22-Jun-21)	1)CARE AA-; Stable / CARE A1+ (23-Sep-20)
5	Commercial paper- Commercial paper (Standalone)	ST	-	-	-	-	1)Withdrawn (12-Apr-21)	1)CARE A1+ (23-Sep-20) 2)CARE A1+ (02-Jun-20)
6	Fund-based/Non-fund-based-LT/ST	LT/ST*	1190.00	CARE AA / CARE A1+ (RWD)	1)CARE AA; Stable / CARE A1+ (14-Sep-23) 2)CARE AA; Stable / CARE A1+ (07-Jul-23)	-	-	-



Sr. No.	Name of the Instrument/ Bank Facilities	Current Ratings			Rating History			
		Type	Amount Outstanding (₹ crore)	Rating	Date(s) and Rating(s) assigned in 2023-2024	Date(s) and Rating(s) assigned in 2022-2023	Date(s) and Rating(s) assigned in 2021-2022	Date(s) and Rating(s) assigned in 2020-2021
7	Fund-based - ST-Working capital demand loan	ST	100.00	CARE A1+ (RWD)	1)CARE A1+ (14-Sep-23)	-	-	-

\*Long term/Short term.

**Annexure-3: Detailed explanation of covenants of the rated instruments/facilities:** Not applicable

**Annexure-4: Complexity level of the various instruments rated**

Sr. No.	Name of the Instrument	Complexity Level
1	Fund-based - LT-Cash credit	Simple
2	Fund-based - ST-Working capital demand loan	Simple
3	Fund-based/Non-fund-based-LT/ST	Simple
4	Non-fund-based - LT/ ST-BG/LC	Simple

**Annexure-5: Lender details**

To view the lender wise details of bank facilities please [click here](#)

**Annexure-6: List of companies getting consolidated in PCBL (As on March 31, 2023):**

Subsidiaries	Holding of PCBL	Country of origin
Phillips Carbon Black Cyprus Holdings Ltd (PCBLCHL)	100%	Cyprus
Phillips Carbon Black Vietnam Joint Stock Company	80%	Vietnam
PCBL (TN) Ltd	100%	India
PCBL Europe SRL (w.e.f April 14, 2023)	100%	Belgium

**Note on the complexity levels of the rated instruments:** CARE Ratings has classified instruments rated by it on the basis of complexity. Investors/market intermediaries/regulators or others are welcome to write to [care@careedge.in](mailto:care@careedge.in) for any clarifications.

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### About us:

Established in 1993, CARE Ratings is one of the leading credit rating agencies in India. Registered under the Securities and Exchange Board of India, it has been acknowledged as an External Credit Assessment Institution by the RBI. With an equitable position in the Indian capital market, CARE Ratings provides a wide array of credit rating services that help corporates raise capital and enable investors to make informed decisions. With an established track record of rating companies over almost three decades, CARE Ratings follows a robust and transparent rating process that leverages its domain and analytical expertise, backed by the methodologies congruent with the international best practices. CARE Ratings has played a pivotal role in developing bank debt and capital market instruments, including commercial papers, corporate bonds and debentures, and structured credit.

### Disclaimer:

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