



Signing of International Arrangement to Enhance Trade

An international arrangement, signed in Washington, DC, on 2 November 2000, will enhance the acceptance of technical data accompanying goods crossing national borders. The Arrangement, which involves 37 member bodies from 28 economies represented at the General Assembly of the International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (ILAC), means that goods tested in one country by a laboratory that is accredited under a signatory to the Arrangement, will be accepted by other signatories. This is a major step towards reducing or eliminating the need for re-testing of the goods by the importing country.

The Arrangement enters into force from 31 January 2001.

Belinda Collins, Chair of ILAC, noted the significance of the signing, "For many years, the retesting of goods by an importing country has been considered as a major technical barrier to trade. The World Trade Organization (WTO) identified such technical barriers as a major concern to world trade since the mid-1970s. Such barriers can not only add significant cost to goods entering a country, but can also delay, and in some cases prevent, the goods being accepted by foreign markets."

Dr. Collins further explained that "ILAC has been working towards overcoming these technical barriers for the last two decades by encouraging the development of regional recognition arrangements culminating in today's global recognition arrangement among representative bodies in each country. This will facilitate the acceptance of goods already tested by an accredited laboratory. Thus, goods tested in one country should enjoy easier access to foreign markets participating in the Arrangement."

The key to the Arrangement is the developing network of accredited testing and calibration facilities around the globe that are evaluated and recognized as being competent by specific authorities, known as laboratory accreditation bodies. These bodies are located in many economies and many of them participate in ILAC.

The following economies will participate in the Arrangement:

Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, People's Republic of China, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hong Kong, China, India, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Singapore, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Chinese Taipei, United Kingdom, United States of America, Vietnam

A cornerstone of the new Arrangement is the utilization of existing or developing regional arrangements established in the Americas, the Asia Pacific region, Europe and Southern Africa. The bodies participating in these regional arrangements are responsible for maintaining the necessary confidence in accreditation bodies from their region that are signatories to the new ILAC Arrangement.

Mike Peet, Chair of the ILAC committee that developed the new Arrangement, explained the basis for the Arrangement's implementation by the international community: "Now that the Arrangement is in place, the next crucial step is for governments to take advantage of this Arrangement by using it to further develop or enhance trade agreements."

"There is now a firm foundation in place for manufacturers and exporters that have their goods tested by accredited laboratories to enjoy greater market access, less costs associated with re-testing, and overall greater competitiveness in global markets", he explained.

Established in 1977, ILAC is the peak international forum for the harmonization of laboratory accreditation procedures as a means of reducing technical barriers to trade, and the promotion of laboratory accreditation as a mechanism to enhance confidence in testing and calibration facilities, both domestically and internationally.

For further details on the ILAC Arrangement please contact the ILAC Secretariat on ph: +612 9736 8374, fax: +612 9736 8373 or e-mail: ilac@nata.asn.au.

Chair: Belinda Collins
NIST
1000 Bureau Drive,
Stop 2100
Gaithersburg, MD
20899-2100 U.S.A.
Phone: +1 301 975-4000
Fax: +1 301 963-2871
Email: bcollins@nist.gov

Secretariat 7 Leeds Street,
Rhodes, NSW, 2138
Australia
Phone: +61 2 9736 8222
Fax: +61 2 9743 5311
Email: ilac@nata.asn.au