

STANDARDISATION GUIDE 007:

ADOPTION OF INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS

UNDER REVIEW

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Contents

1	INTRODUCTION	3
2	POLICY	3
3	BENEFITS of the ADOPTION of INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS	3
4	IMPLICATIONS OF WTO	3
5	INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS	4
6	EQUIVALENCE and LOCAL VARIATIONS	5
	APPENDIX A – Procedure for adoption of International Standards	6
A.1	General outline of the process	6
A.2	Parallel Adoption of International Standards	6
A.3	Presentation	6
A.4	Designation	7
A.5	Maintenance of adopted Standards	7
	APPENDIX B – Definitions used by International Standards bodies	7
	APPENDIX C – The advantages of adopting International Standards	7
	DOCUMENT HISTORY	8

UNDER REVIEW

1 INTRODUCTION

This Guide sets out the policy of Standards Australia on the adoption of International Standards as Australian Standards (including joint Australian/New Zealand Standards) and is intended to assist committees in their consideration of the international alignment of Standards under development. Guidance for committees on related process issues is given in [Appendix A](#).

The body charged with the responsibility for setting this policy is the Standards Australia Standards Development and Accreditation Committee (SDAC).

For any given Standard, the decision on whether to adopt an International Standard normally rests with the appropriate Standards Technical Committee (TC).

2 POLICY

The policy of Standards Australia is to base Australian Standards on International Standards to the maximum extent feasible and to apply the requirements of the World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (known as the WTO TBT Agreement) as a benchmark.

Notwithstanding the fact that the WTO TBT Agreement is addressed to national governments and is only binding for technical regulations for tradable goods, the policy extends to ensuring that all Australian Standards meet the provisions of Articles 2.2 and 2.4 of the WTO TBT Agreement, 1994. The immediate consequence is that Australian Standards should be adoptions of International Standards, unless there are good reasons to the contrary.

This compliance would also ensure that obligations of Australia under the WTO TBT Agreement would be met if any such Standard were adopted by a government agency as a technical regulation (see [Implications of WTO](#)).

In addition, Standards Australia is committed to complying with Annex 3 of the WTO TBT Agreement, the Code of Good Practice for the Preparation, Adoption and Application of Standards, which is applicable to non-government standardising bodies such as Standards Australia.

NOTE: 1) Article 2 and Annex 3 of the WTO TBT Agreement can be viewed at http://www.wto.org/english/docs_e/legal_e/17-tbt_e.htm.

NOTE: 2) The ISO/IEC Guide 59, Code of Good Standardization Practice, is also acknowledged as a useful reference document.

3 BENEFITS of the ADOPTION of INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS

The principal benefit to Australia of basing Australian Standards on the equivalent International Standards is the benefit to the Australian economy by facilitating the international exchange of goods and services. Other benefits include:

- International (IEC and ISO) Standards generally reflect the best experience of industry and regulators worldwide and cover conditions in a variety of countries;
- Australia's obligations under the WTO TBT Agreement are supported; and
- Participation in international certification schemes is facilitated.

4 IMPLICATIONS OF WTO

GATT is the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade which Australia first signed in early 1992. The GATT developed TBT Agreement is now administered by the WTO. In relation to Standards, the GATT, now the WTO TBT Agreement, obliges signatory countries not to raise non-tariff (i.e. technical) barriers to trade.

The mechanism by which this section of the WTO TBT Agreement operates is that any mandatory Standard issued by a signatory nation that might have an impact on trade must be reported to the other WTO signatories via a network of national notification points. The other nations then have a period during which they may lodge a challenge to the implementation of the Standard on the grounds that it represents a non-tariff barrier to trade. Alignment of the national Standard in question with the equivalent International Standard is recognised as a full and adequate discharge of a nation's obligations under this section of the WTO TBT Agreement.

In Australia, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) is the WTO Notification Point. Under Articles 2.2 and 2.4 of the WTO TBT Agreement, mandatory national Standards shall not be more trade restrictive than necessary to fulfil a legitimate objective, taking into account the risks non-fulfilment would create. Such legitimate objectives include:

- a) National security requirements;
- b) Prevention of deceptive practices;
- c) Protection of human health or safety, animal or plant life or health, or the environment; and
- d) Fundamental climatic or other geographical factors.

NOTE: Reciprocal rights of appeal under the WTO Code are available to Australian manufacturers supplying overseas markets.

Standards Australia has notified the WTO of its voluntary adherence to the WTO TBT Agreement of Good Practice for Preparation, Adoption and Certification of Standards. While the WTO TBT Agreement does not place a strict, immediate obligation on non-government standardisation bodies, such as Standards Australia, to alter Standards to align with International Standards, the policy of Standards Australia is to follow Articles 2.2 and 2.4 of the WTO TBT Agreement, particularly where the Standard under development may be called up by a regulatory body. A similar obligation is imposed upon accredited Standards Development Organisations (SDOs) by the Standards Development and Accreditation Committee (SDAC).

5 INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS

The International Standards which are covered by this policy are normally understood to include:

- a) ISO Standards, published by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO);
- b) IEC Standards, published by the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC);
- c) Standards published by other international bodies having similar standing to that of ISO/IEC, e.g. CIE, IWTO, ITU; and
- d) A national or regional Standard which, in the absence of an International Standard, is so widely used internationally that it is generally recognised as being the de-facto International Standard. In recent years certain European regional Standards produced by CEN and CENELEC have achieved the status of de-facto International Standards. Similarly, the American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME) Boiler Code has gained this level of acceptance in many parts of the World.

There is occasionally confusion about the difference between an 'International Standard' and an overseas national Standard. Except as set out in Item (d) above, the national or industry Standards of other countries are not considered to be 'International Standards' for the purposes of this Guide.

NOTE: Standards Australia and Standards New Zealand both have agreements with the European Committee for Standardization (CEN); however, these agreements are not identical. Where Australia has certain rights to adopt and modify CEN documents and text, New Zealand does not. If a CEN document is used for a joint AS/NZS Standard, New Zealand only has permission to reproduce the original text; modifications must be approved by the CEN.

6 EQUIVALENCE and LOCAL VARIATIONS

ISO/IEC have identified three levels of international equivalence, identical (IDT), modified (MOD) and not equivalent (NEQ) – see [Appendix B](#) for more details. When assessing which level might apply, the key consideration is whether or not a product designed to comply with the International Standard would automatically meet the equivalent Australian Standard, and vice versa. If this is the case, the Australian Standard is normally referred to as being 'identical' to the International Standard.

Even though the objective is to exactly align Australian Standards with the corresponding International Standards, there will be Standards in which local changes have to be incorporated. As described above, there are several legitimate reasons for varying the technical requirements of an International Standard as set out in Articles 2.2 and 2.4 of the WTO TBT Agreement; but these reasons, such as the one related to human health and safety in Article 2.2, should not be interpreted too broadly.

Only where a comprehensive assessment of the International Standard reveals a demonstrable and unacceptable level of risk to human health and safety if the Standard is followed would this Article apply and, even then, the extent of the permissible variation is limited to that required to bring the level of risk down to an acceptable level. This point needs to be borne in mind when developing Standards.

When variations to an International Standard have been included in the equivalent Australian Standard, it is essential that all technical variations are clearly identified and explained in the Australian Standard, based on the criteria in the WTO TBT Agreement (see Appendix A3).

NOTE: For general rules regarding the drafting of Australian Standards, refer to [SG-006: Rules for the structure and drafting of Australian Standards](#).

UNDER REVIEW

APPENDIX A – Procedure for adoption of International Standards

A.1 General outline of the process

Consideration of the adoption of an International Standard should be an integrated part of the Standards development process, along with the other considerations, such as costs and benefits, described in [SG-001: Preparing Standards](#). The following guidelines may assist committees to achieve a smooth integration:

- a) Before any Standards project is approved, a search must be undertaken by the proponent as part of the Project Proposal submission process and by Standards Australia when assessing the proposal to identify equivalent overseas or International Standards. The Committee should review the results of the search when it first considers the new project and make an informed decision on how best to proceed.
- b) Committees should take an active role in developing International Standards corresponding to their own national interests. It is frequently possible to significantly influence the content of an International Standard so as to make it more suitable for use in Australia.
- c) Any International Standard used as the basis for an Australian Standard should be one that is used in practice in other countries. To assess this, committees may need to gain some information on support for the International Standard in practice.
- d) In certain technologies the relevant International Standards have never been widely implemented and this can result in such Standards not being sufficiently scrutinised in their development and, therefore, either being impractical or lacking in detail. While the lack of quality of the International Standards can delay their adoption in Australia, it should not be seen as an immovable obstacle; the remedy is to promote wider participation in the development of the International Standards so that they are sufficiently flexible to provide for the varying circumstances of use prevailing in all countries concerned. To a large extent, the signing of the WTO TBT Agreement and other regional trade agreements will lend impetus to such moves.
- e) Standards Australia recommends local adoption wherever possible; the advantages of this are outlined in [Appendix C](#). If an International Standard is identified that fully satisfies local requirements, an assessment needs to be undertaken to determine the value of having a local adoption rather than allowing the International Standard to be used directly in the marketplace.
- f) The decision to adopt an International Standard should be based upon the principles described in this Guide and the timing of any changes to existing national Standards in order to align with International Standards that should be acceptable to all stakeholders.
- g) When variations to an International Standard have been included in the equivalent Australian Standard, it is essential that all technical variations are clearly identified and explained in the Australian Standard, based on the criteria in the WTO TBT Agreement (see [Appendix A3](#)).

A.2 Parallel Adoption of International Standards

Appendix A.2 is currently under review and will be updated when the process has been reconfirmed. If you have an enquiry regarding parallel adoption of International Standards please contact a Standards Australia Project Manager, National Sector Manager or the Standards Information Service – [Contact Us](#).

A.3 Presentation

The method of presenting International Standards as Australian Standards is to electronically reproduce the International Standard as a PDF file, and add a Preface which sets out the international origin of the document and whether there are local variations, and the reasons for these

variations. The variations shall be presented in a 'ZZ Appendix' following the source text. Additional normative or informative material may also be added as national appendices. This method is known as "adoption". Variations shall not be applied to the text of the source document, such as the use of strikeout, highlighted inserted variations or marginal bars.

The levels of correspondence, identical (IDT) and modified (MOD)", described in [Appendix B](#) are possible when adopting International Standards. The most important point to note is that the level of correspondence to the International Standard must be immediately apparent to the reader; and for identical or modified adoptions, any local variations clearly indicated.

NOTE: For general rules regarding the drafting of Australian Standards, refer to [SG-006: Rules for the structure and drafting of Australian Standards](#).

A.4 Designation

For guidance regarding the numbering (designation) of Australian Standards that are adoptions of International Standards, refer to [SG-006: Rules for the structure and drafting of Australian Standards](#), Appendix F2 Designation.

A.5 Maintenance of adopted Standards

Once an Australian Standard has been aligned with its international counterpart, it is important to ensure that amendments to, and revisions of, the International Standard are mirrored in the local Standard so that international equivalence is maintained. Similarly, the effect on international equivalence needs to be considered before any local amendment to an adopted Standard is made.

APPENDIX B – Definitions used by International Standards bodies

When describing the degree of alignment between an Australian and an International Standard, the Australian Standard shall be described as either being identical (IDT), modified (MOD) or not equivalent (NEQ), in relation to the International Standard. These terms shall be used, which are based on those of ISO/IEC Guide 21-1: 2005.

For definitions of identical, modified and not equivalent, refer to [SG-006: Rules for the structure and drafting of Australian Standards](#), Appendix F Indication of alignment with International Standards.

APPENDIX C – The advantages of adopting International Standards

It is Standards Australia's recommendation that International Standards be adopted nationally rather than simply relying on the use of the International Standard. This begs the question of what value adoption adds, given that the International Standard would otherwise still be available to the Standards-using public. The following points were taken into account when formulating this recommendation and are worthy of consideration by committees when considering this question:

- The national adoption of International Standards clearly indicates to the Standards-using community that the International Standard has been reviewed and endorsed by a Standards Australia committee and found to be relevant to the economic efficiency or safety of the Australian community.
- It clearly indicates that the Standards Australia committee has determined that the International Standard is used internationally by Australia's trading partners and is not enshrining obsolete or little used technologies or practices.
- It enables, where appropriate, the selection of options for local usage that are provided for in some International Standards.



- It expands the portfolio of Australian Standards coverage and thus encourages those seeking standardisation information to seek it from within Australian Standards.
- It provides the Australian Standards-using community with the adopted International Standard at a price that is often less than the International Standard and thus encouraging more use of Standards for the benefit of trade and the Australian community.

In summary, where there is a demonstrated need for a reasonably active use of an International Standard in Australia, it should be adopted as an Australian Standard.

References

ISO/IEC Guide 21-1, *Regional or national adoption of International Standards and other International Deliverables—Adoption of International Standards*, first edition, 2005.

ISO/IEC Guide 59, *Code of Good Standardization Practice*, first edition, 1994.

DOCUMENT HISTORY

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22/02/12	P&P Officer	v1.3 - Update all hyperlinks after new corporate website released & transfer text into current template.
16/01/13	P&P Coordinator	v1.4 - Reconfirmed/updated Document History & re-issued.
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14/04/20	P&P Coordinator	v1.7 - Updated incorrect clause reference to SG-006 in Appendix A4 and sB.