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STANDARDS
Australia

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE

Inquiry Into The Regulation Of Plumbing Product Quality In Australia

Standards Australia Submission

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1. Introduction

Standards Australia welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage's *Inquiry into the Regulation of Plumbing Product Quality in Australia*.

Our chief objectives in making this submission are:

- To support the review and provide relevant background information to assist the Inquiry in its deliberations.
- Provide commentary on the particular points in the Terms of Reference.
- To provide details of Standards Australia's role in the development of Standards to underpin the WELS scheme and the WaterMark scheme.
- To provide details of Standards Australia's role in the WaterMark scheme.

2. Standards Australia as an Organisation

The Federal Government recognises Standards Australia as the nation's peak non-government standards development and approval body. Standards Australia prepares voluntary, technical and commercial standards for use in Australia and accredits other Australian Standards Development Organizations.

It meets national needs for contemporary, internationally aligned standards and related services that enhance Australia's economic efficiency and international competitiveness.

To ensure this, a Memorandum of Understanding has existed between Standards Australia and the Commonwealth Government since 1988. Among the principal accords, are that no Australian Standard will contravene the World Trade Organization's requirements that national standards should not be used as non-tariff barriers to free trade; and agreement that no new Australian Standard will be developed where an acceptable international standard already exists.

Standards Australia is Australia's member of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) and the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design (ICSID), providing a link to international best practice and creating further efficiencies.

Standards Australia and Standards New Zealand work co-operatively in developing joint standards; approximately 32% of our standards are jointly developed and approximately 80% of New Zealand Standards are jointly developed. Standards Australia and Standards New Zealand have a Memorandum of Understanding in place setting out the principles to act in good faith and co-operate with one another to develop joint Australian/New Zealand Standards.

Commencing three years ago with the sale of its former commercial services, Standards Australia is undergoing significant change and is ambitiously recasting itself into a responsive and proactive standards approver and developer, capable of working with industry sectors and governments to recognise, assist, service and/or develop nationally and internationally consistent self-regulatory regimes.

Standards Australia has well-established links into all areas of Australian business, professions, academia and the community with more than 9,000 experts drawn from over 1,000 nominating organizations developing around 500 new and revised standards each year. It has developed standards across most sectors of the Australian economy, in traditional industries such as goods and services, engineering and construction; in other technical areas such as health and food; in emerging new areas of technology such as e-health and nanotechnology; as well as in less technologically based subjects such as complaints handling and risk management.

3. Commentary on Particular Points in the Terms of Reference

(a) Appropriateness and effectiveness of the current plumbing product quality regulatory arrangements.

The current arrangements involving the creation of National Plumbing Regulators Forum (NPRF) and the publication of a model regulation such as the Plumbing Code of Australia (PCA) were achieved after a very long period of flux when no coordination and clear responsibilities existed for the administration and implementation of plumbing regulations. In fact, from the early 90s to almost the end of the decade, in many instances the Australian Standard AS 3500, now a joint publication with New Zealand had become the *de facto* regulation used by industry and indeed the regulators themselves.

Standards Australia recognised that this was not a convenient situation for an independent private organisation to be given a regulatory role even if in an informal manner. Standards Australia held fora and seminars proposing the creation of a national body that could coordinate the plumbing regulations and also take the overall responsibility for the approval of those plumbing and drainage products to be connected to the infrastructure. The NPRF was finally established with the assistance of the Australian Building Codes Board (ABCB) and the new body assumed responsibilities for the publication of a model plumbing regulation (PCA) and the approval of the health and safety requirements related to plumbing and drainage products.

Standards Australia was selected by NPRF as the administrator of the certification scheme attached to the PCA, as it is the owner of the WaterMark. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) exists between Standards Australia and the NPRF where Standards Australia is also required to maintain a national database of approved products and manage a policy committee overseeing the performance of the scheme.

Three years ago, Standards Australia opened up the certification scheme to any conformity assessment bodies (CAB) accredited by JAS-ANZ. This action removed any uncertainty related to the relation between Standards Australia and SAI-Global Certification as the rules governing the scheme are now transparent. The ownership retention of the WaterMark logo by Standards

Australia was seen as an assurance that no commercial interests could re-establish a monopoly in any way.

(b) **Scale of environmental benefits from controlling plumbing product quality.**

The transformation of the voluntary water efficiency scheme, originally operated by Standards Australia and then by the Water Services Association of Australia (WSAA), to a mandatory scheme under initially the Department of Environment and Health (DEH) and then the Department of Environment and Water Resources (DEWR) has created a certain number of complexities and anomalies with the WaterMark scheme that need to be addressed. In those instances where products are labelled under the Water Efficient Labelling and Standards (WELS) scheme, but are not certified under the WaterMark scheme for health and safety, the products cannot be installed under the requirements of the PCA.

The anomalies between the two schemes mean that the effectiveness of both schemes are diminished. Tangible environmental benefits for products certified under the WaterMark scheme are that they're continually assessed for inclusion in the scheme with the aim of saving energy, water and reducing pollution. The WELS scheme, on the other hand, encourages improved designs of existing products to reduce water consumption.

(c) **Trade implications of controlling plumbing product quality**

The product certification scheme, WaterMark, provides the framework for testing and certifying products aimed at the market place by ensuring that they are safe for the customer to use. (One example that comes to mind, although related to another industry, is the Mattel toys recall). It would also appear that the WELS scheme, by not making clear declarations, causes some confusion in the market place as trade assumes that products being labelled by DEWR automatically comply with the requirements of the PCA and the WaterMark scheme.

(d) **Potential improvements to the plumbing quality regulatory system**

It is Standards Australia view that there should be better enforcement of the regulatory systems currently in place.

(e) **The appropriate level of government to administer plumbing product quality regulation, that is, the states (as is now) or the Commonwealth**

Standards Australia believes that the WELS labelling scheme should apply only to products that are fit for purpose (i.e. they comply with the product safety standards). Point of sale legislation similar to that implemented with electrical products would resolve most of the above issues.

4. Stakeholder Relationships for Plumbing Area

Attached is a diagram that shows the major relationships between Standards Australia and the stakeholders in the plumbing area, and includes the Standards Australia committees and the major Australian Standards.

5. WELS Scheme

Standards Australia committee WS-032 Water Efficient Appliances is responsible for the development of AS/NZS 6400:2005 Water efficient products - Rating and labelling that support the WELS scheme.

AS/NZS 6400 Standard forms a basis for the rating and labelling of a range of products under the mandatory Water Efficiency Labelling and Standards (WELS) Scheme, as required by the Australian Water Efficiency Labelling and Standards Act 2005 (the WELS Act). The WELS scheme does not include public health and safety requirements.

Other Committees, for example Committees WS-001 (taps and showers), el-015-04 (washing machines and dishwashers), WS-003 (urinals and toilets), develop the standards for test procedures to measure the performance i.e. water consumption for products under the WELS Scheme.

The constitution of Committee WS-032 is as follows:

- Australian Building Codes Board
- Australian Electrical and Electronic Manufacturers Association
- Australian Industry Group
- BRANZ
- Building Officials Institute of New Zealand
- CSIRO Manufacturing & Materials Technology
- Consumer Electronics Suppliers Association
- Consumers' Federation of Australia
- Department of Land and Water Conservation NSW
- Department of Natural Resources and Water (Qld)
- Department of Sustainability and Environment (Victoria)
- Department of the Environment and Water Resources
- Joint Accreditation System of Australia and New Zealand
- Master Plumbers Association of NSW
- Master Plumbers Australia
- Master Plumbers, Gasfitters and Drainlayers New Zealand
- Ministry for the Environment New Zealand
- National Association of Testing Authorities Australia
- National Plumbing Regulators Forum
- New Zealand Water & Waste Association
- Plumbing Products Industry Group
- Property Council of Australia
- Queensland Brassware Industry Advisory Panel
- South Australian Water Corporation
- Victorian Water Industry Association
- Water Services Association of Australia

6. Watermark Scheme

(a) Standards Australia Technical Committee

Standards Australia Committee WS-031 Technical Procedures for Plumbing and Drainage Products Authorisation is responsible for the development of plumbing public health and safety product standards, reviewing standards developed by other Standards Australia technical committees to ensure they comply with the Plumbing Code of Australia, and making recommendations to the National Plumbing Regulators Forum for the inclusion of these national standards and international standards in the Watermark Scheme.

The product standards have been developed for both the WaterMark Scheme and the WELS scheme. The WaterMark scheme utilises both the safety and the water consumption testing requirements, while the WELS scheme utilises only the water consumption testing requirements.

This committee is responsible for the AS 5200 series of standards Technical specification for plumbing and drainage products.

The constitution of Committee WS-031 is as follows:

- Association of Accredited Certification Bodies
- Australian Electrical and Electronic Manufacturers Association
- Australian Gas Association
- Australian Industry Group
- Australian Stainless Steel Development Association
- BRANZ
- Building Officials Institute of New Zealand
- CSIRO Manufacturing & Materials Technology
- Certification Interests (Australia)
- Consumer Electronics Suppliers Association
- Copper Development Centre - Australia
- Gas Appliances and Services Association
- Master Plumbers Australia
- Master Plumbers and Mechanical Services Association of Australia
- Master Plumbers, Gasfitters and Drainlayers New Zealand
- National Fire Industry Association
- National Plumbing Regulators Forum
- New Zealand Water & Waste Association
- Plastics Industry Pipe Association of Australia
- Plumbing Industry Commission
- Plumbing Products Industry Group
- South Australian Water Corporation
- Water Services Association of Australia

The other related Technical Committees for plumbing standards are:

WS-001	Water fittings
WS-002	Sanitary Plumbing Fittings
WS-003	Sanitary Plumbing Fixtures
WS-004	Steel Pipes and Fittings Water and Gas
WS-010	Flexible Jointing Gaskets

WS-014	National Plumbing and Drainage Code
WS-018	Copper and Copper Alloy Tubes for Plumbing and Gasfitting
WS-019	Stainless Steel
WS-023	Backflow Prevention Devices for Water Supply
WS-024	Meters for Cold Potable Water
WS-026	Valves Primarily for use in Warm and Hot Water Systems
WS-027	Domestic Water Treatment Appliances
PL-006	Polyolefin Pipe Systems
PL-021	PVC, ABS and Polyamide Pipe Systems
EL-020	Electric Water Heating Appliances

(b) Watermark Operations Advisory Committee

Standards Australia Committee P-009 WaterMark Operations Advisory Committee is responsible for developing the WaterMark scheme rules and procedures, which are published in the following documents:

- MP 78-1999 Manual for the assessment of risks of plumbing products
- MP 52-2005 Manual of authorization procedures for plumbing and drainage products

The constitution of Committee P-009 is as follows

- Association of Accredited Certification Bodies
- Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- Australian Gas Association
- Australian Industry Group
- CSIRO Manufacturing & Materials Technology
- Certification Interests (Australia)
- Communications, Electrical and Plumbing Union
- Consumers' Federation of Australia
- Copper Development Centre - Australia
- Gas Appliance Manufacturers Association of Australia
- Housing Industry Association
- Joint Accreditation System of Australia and New Zealand
- Master Builders Australia
- Master Plumbers and Mechanical Services Association of Australia
- National Plumbing Regulators Forum
- Plastics Industry Pipe Association of Australia
- Plumbing Products Industry Group
- Water Services Association of Australia

(c) Administration of WaterMark Scheme

Standards Australia is the owner of the Watermark Trade Mark, and manages the WaterMark scheme on behalf of the National Plumbing Regulators Forum. The scheme is open to all Conformity Assessment Bodies that are accredited for the certification of Plumbing Products with JAS-ANZ and enter into the Approved Certifier Agreement available on the WaterMark Website.

Currently there are six licensed approved Conformity Assessment Bodies to certify products under the WaterMark Scheme.

Standards Australia also manages the database of authorised products under the WaterMark scheme.

Standards Australia's administration of the WaterMark scheme is not compatible with our business structure and strategic goals going forward. This matter has been advised to the National Plumbing Regulators Forum so discussions can be undertaken to determine a new administrator of the WaterMark Scheme, and an orderly and proper transfer of management of this scheme.

7. Conclusion

We trust the comments provided above are seen as constructive and adding to the Commissions understanding of some of the complexities relating to the regulation of Plumbing Product Quality in Australia

Should the Committee require further information or elaboration relating to Standards Australia's Submission you are invited to contact Colin Blair, Deputy CEO, phone number: 02 9237 6007, who would be pleased to assist.

Standards Australia is prepared to cooperate and assist where possible in the delivery of positive outcomes on this issue.

