



**CONSUMERS
FEDERATION
OF AUSTRALIA**

Developing and promoting
the consumer interest

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General Manager Operations
Standards Australia
Level 10, The Exchange Centre
20 Bridge Street, Sydney, NSW 2000

Dear Kareen,

Alternate Standards Development Proposals—consultation paper

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on the Standards Australia Consultation Paper, *Alternative Standards Development Proposals*.

About Consumers Federation of Australia (CFA)

As you know, CFA is the not-for-profit peak body for consumer organisations in Australia, advocating in the interests of Australian consumers. It supports networking and communication amongst consumer advocates, promotes, and supports its members' campaigns and events, nominates and supports consumer representatives to industry and government processes, develops policy on important consumer issues and facilitates consumer participation in the development of Australian and international standards for goods and services.

CFA plays an important role in ensuring consumer interests are represented in the development of standards. In recognition of the importance of promoting consumer involvement in standardisation, CFA recruits, facilitates, and supports the active participation of expert consumer representatives on technical committees that are responsible for the development of Standards. This work is supported through an annual grant from Standards Australia. CFA consumer representatives are volunteers and are unable to cover the financial costs associated with attending in-person standards development activities. Standards Australia financial support enables, encourages, and generates consistent consumer participation throughout the standards development process.

In the past year CFA had representation on over 70 Standards Australia committees as well as related international committees, with 28 individuals representing CFA and supporting the interests of consumers. Volunteer representatives of CFA also participate as Registered Australian Experts on international standards committees, which builds capacity and ensures Australian Standards both match and inform international best practice.

CFA strongly supports consumer involvement with, and the role of CFA in, the standards development process. The involvement of consumer representatives ensures that standards development is improved, and builds public confidence in the standards themselves, by including broader community and public interest perspectives.

The case for change and the role of consumer representatives

CFA acknowledges Standards Australia should regularly update and adapt its processes given the changing environment in which it works. There are community expectations that standards be put in place as quickly as possible, and that the standards development processes must operate quickly and efficiently to achieve this. However, speed must not be prioritised ahead of procedural integrity. A balanced committee, community engagement and public consultation are essential to the development of robust and quality standards.

Standards are an integral part of the way we protect consumers globally. Agreed by experts, businesses and consumers, standards make our world easier, safer, and more accessible¹. Standards-setting in Australia is built upon three internationally recognised principles of balance, transparency, and consensus, with representation from affected stakeholders, including consumers². This provides the rigour expected of standards development and CFA considers that public consultation is a core part of the process.

Consumer engagement in standards processes enables consumer perspectives to be shared with others involved in the development of standards. CFA representatives bring their own expertise to a committee, making contributions of equal importance to those from representatives of industry, government, testing organisations or other stakeholder groups. CFA representatives address societal issues and directly enhance the market relevance and consumer confidence in a standard³ by:

- providing feedback on acceptable levels of risk for the products defined by standards;
- offering advice on communication issues, including labelling, product instructions, and warnings;
- suggesting features needed by consumers with special needs such as children, older adults, or people with disabilities; and
- giving examples of how goods and services are actually used (or predictably misused) in practice.

CFA standards representatives, in the role described above, also play an integral role in the adoption of international standards in Australia. This includes participating in the development of international

¹ Consumers International <https://www.consumersinternational.org/what-we-do/consumer-protection/standards/>

² [SG-002 Structure and operation of Standardisation Committees](#) p.6

³ International Organization for Standardization. Involving Consumers: Why and How. <https://www.iso.org/obp/ui#iso:pub:PUB100277>

standards, through technical committees and working groups of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC), as well as national mirror committees which facilitate the adoption of international standards locally. These standards setting processes are designed to ensure a balance of representation and consumer input in the development and adoption of international standards.

Alternative path for the development of Australian Standards

The proposed alternative path for the development of Australian Standards includes the following changes compared to the traditional model:

- Amending the pathway to initial approval to allow Standards Australia's management team to propose new work, in consultation with stakeholders.
- Establishing a role for a Project Committee to aid in the delivery of the technical work.
- Adopting the consensus principles of ISO and IEC principles, in place of the established formula used by Standards Australia in our traditional model.

The proposed Alternate Path Model Project Committee would not be made up of representatives of Nominating Organisations. The Consultation Paper notes that "consideration must be inclusion of small business and consumer interests", but it remains unclear how this "consideration" is to be given effect. CFA is concerned that Standards Australia selecting committee members for the Alternate Path Model risks not meeting the internationally recognised principles of standards setting and may be a non-inclusive process. This may affect the quality and credibility of decisions in the Model to the detriment of broader consumer interests and not deliver the best outcome.

CFA considers that SA should commit to ensuring Alternate Path Model project committees include consumer organisation representatives. This is essential to deliver on the benefits of consumer involvement outlined above. If a consumer representative is not to be included in a project committee, we seek more specific articulation in the relevant guidelines about how consumer interests are to be considered by the committee to ensure that this is done effectively.

Also, CFA has concerns that the Alternative Path Model priority for getting things done quickly may facilitate inappropriately bypassing current committees, when they would be more appropriate as the forum for addressing address emerging issues not perceived to be covered adequately in an existing standard.

We also raise concerns about the changes to the proposed approval process, so that "consensus is deemed to have been achieved if technical comments received through the consultation process are resolved, and a formal assessment is made as to support for the publication". We think it remains important that a consumer representative be involved in the endorsement process before a standard is adopted. This is an important safeguard and should be included as part of the proposed formal assessment which is to be made regarding support for publication of a proposed standard.

Streamlining the adoption of International Standards

The proposed new opt-in model for the adoption of International Standards available to constituted technical committees, should have appropriate stakeholder support safeguards in place to ensure a positive vote internationally does not mandate the AU version.

The Consultation Paper states that this includes a 4-week period of community consultation and the capacity for the technical committee to object to the adoption if needed. CFA is concerned about a reduction in the period for community consultation of already published international standards from the standard 6 weeks to 4 weeks. We are concerned that this may not give sufficient time for community representatives, often stretched for time and resources, to be made aware of the consultation, consult with others, and make a response.

Changes to Interim Standards

Interim Standards are developed when a subject field has not fully determined all the requirements or if national consensus is anticipated but has not yet been reached and to collect public feedback on the subject.⁴ The proposed change to Interim Standards is designed to support the uptake of this option. Amendments are proposed to remove the automatic withdrawal of an Interim Standard after a period of two years from publication (current arrangement), requiring the technical committee to decide whether to withdraw, convert to an AS, revise the text or reconfirm/extend.

CFA considers that it is important that an Interim Standard is subject to active consideration by a technical committee before it is extended or converted to an AS to ensure it is appropriate to be used in the Australian context or adopted in legislation.

Thank you again for the opportunity to respond to this consultation paper. Please contact Regina Godfredson, CFA Standards Project Coordinator, standards@consumeraction.org.au if you have any questions or need further information.

Yours sincerely

CONSUMERS' FEDERATION OF AUSTRALIA



Gerard Brody
Chair

⁴Standards Australia <https://www.standards.org.au/faqs>