

Developments in mutual recognition for telecommunications

In June 1998, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Telecommunications and Information Ministers agreed to update APEC-wide processes for testing and type-approving telecommunications equipment. This landmark arrangement which commenced in July 1999, the Mutual Recognition Arrangement for Conformity Assessment of Telecommunications Equipment (APEC TEL MRA), was the first multilateral agreement of its type in the world.

The APEC TEL MRA streamlines conformity assessment procedures for a wide range of telecommunications and telecommunications-related equipment, and helps trade among the APEC member economies.

It provides for the mutual recognition, by an importing economy, of conformity assessment bodies (CABs); and for mutual acceptance of the results of testing and equipment certification procedures undertaken by those bodies in assessing the conformity of equipment to the importing economy's own technical regulations.

The scope of the APEC TEL MRA includes all equipment subject to telecommunication regulations, including wired and wireless, terrestrial and satellite equipment. For such equipment, the APEC TEL MRA covers electromagnetic compatibility, specific absorption rate and electrical safety aspects, as well as purely telecommunications aspects of equipment.

In Australia, applications under the APEC TEL MRA are submitted to the ACMA for consideration. Consistent with Australian regulatory arrangements, the ACMA requires overseas CABs to be either accredited by the National Association of Testing Authorities (Australia) or to be accredited by an overseas accreditation body recognised by NATA before being approved as a CAB under the APEC TEL MRA.

New arrangements under development

In response to the APEC leaders' declaration to further reduce transactional costs throughout the region, APEC Telecommunications and Information Ministers agreed at the sixth meeting of APEC Telecommunications and Information Ministers (TELMIN 6) in June 2005 in Lima, Peru, that an MRA be developed and implemented to further the recognition of equivalence of technical requirements.

Where the APEC TEL MRA serves member economies' recognition of each other's conformity assessment results, the recognition of equivalent technical requirements is encouraged by the MRA for Equivalence of Technical Requirements (MRA ETR).

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At the latest APEC Telecommunications and Information Working Group meeting, held in Singapore from 13 to 18 April 2009, it was agreed to circulate the current draft of the MRA ETR within each economy for comment. Any issues or edits raised as part of this consultation will be sent to the APEC TEL MRA Task Force Chair for discussion at the next APEC Telecommunications and Information Working Group meeting, with the expectation that its text will be finalised then.

Once approved, the MRA ETR will be submitted to the next meeting of APEC Telecommunications and Information Ministers (TELMIN 7) for Ministerial endorsement.

The MRA ETR will have effect in Australia subject to two processes. First, the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy must endorse it at TELMIN 7. Second, Australia, via the DBCDE, must notify the APEC TEL Chair that Australia will be participating in it.

Through its Technical Working Group, the ACMA is currently consulting with industry on the text of the MRA ETR, as well as the regulatory and administrative arrangements necessary to give effect to it in Australia in the event of endorsement by the Minister. ☎