

WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

ORGANISATION MONDIALE DU COMMERCE

ORGANIZACIÓN MUNDIAL DEL COMERCIO

RESTRICTED

G/TBT/W/20

20 February 1996

(96-0603)

Committee on Technical Barriers to Trade

Original: English/
anglais/
inglés

COMMUNICATION FROM THE ISO

The attached communication, dated 29 January 1996, has been received from the ISO with the request that it be circulated to Members of the Committee.

Comité des obstacles techniques au commerce

COMMUNICATION DE L'ISO

L'ISO a fait parvenir au Secrétariat la communication ci-après, datée du 29 janvier 1996, en lui demandant de la distribuer aux membres du Comité.

Comité de Obstáculos Técnicos al Comercio

COMUNICACIÓN DE LA ISO

Se ha recibido de la ISO, con ruego de que se distribuya a los Miembros del Comité, la comunicación adjunta de fecha 29 de enero de 1996.



INFORMATION SUBMITTED TO THE WTO/TBT ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR STANDARDIZATION (ISO) IN THE FIELD OF QUALITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL STANDARDS

At the WTO/TBT meeting of 20 October, the ISO observer was requested to provide additional information on the procedure for preparing International Standards and on the membership of the relevant technical committees. This report responds to that request.

1. What is ISO

ISO, a worldwide federation of national standards bodies (one member organization per country) from some 110 countries, was established in 1947. It is a non-governmental organization even though many of its member organizations are governmental agencies.

ISO's work results in international agreements which are published as International Standards. All standards developed by ISO are voluntary.

2. How ISO works

The technical work of ISO is highly decentralized, carried out in a hierarchy of approximately 2000 technical committees, subcommittees and working groups.

ISO standards are market-driven. They are developed in these technical committees by international consensus among experts drawn from the industrial, technical or business sectors which have expressed the need for a particular standard. They may be joined by experts from government, regulatory authorities, testing bodies, academia, consumer groups or other organizations with relevant knowledge, or which have expressed a direct interest in the standard under development. Although ISO standards are voluntary, the fact that they are developed in response to market demand, and are based on consensus among the interested parties, ensures widespread use of the standards.

The major responsibility for administrating a standards committee is accepted by one of the national standards bodies that make up the ISO membership.

It is not part of ISO's mission to verify that its standards are being implemented by users in conformity with the requirements of the standards. Conformity assessment - as this verification process is known - is a matter for suppliers and their clients in the private sector, and of regulatory bodies when ISO standards have been incorporated into public legislation.

In addition, there exist many testing laboratories and auditing bodies which offer independent (known as *third party*) conformity assessment services to verify that products, services or systems measure up to ISO standards. Such organizations may perform these services under a mandate to a regulatory authority, or as a commercial activity of which the aim is to create confidence between suppliers and their clients. In some countries, ISO members carry out conformity assessment, either on behalf of their respective governments, or as a business operation. ISO itself, however, has no authority to control these activities.

What ISO *does* is develop – in partnership with the IEC (International Electrotechnical Commission) – ISO/IEC Guides covering various aspects of conformity assessment activities and the organizations that perform them. The voluntary criteria contained in these guides represent an international consensus on what constitutes acceptable practice. Their use contributes to the consistency and coherence of conformity assessment worldwide and so facilitates trade across borders.

3. Work of ISO in the field of Quality and Environmental management

The series of standards on quality management (known as the ISO 9000 series) are prepared by ISO/TC 176 *Quality management and quality assurance* to which 52 countries actively participate and 15 countries have observer status. The scope and structure of the committee are presented at annex 1.

Technical committee (ISO/TC) 207 *Environmental management* is preparing a set of standards known as the 14000 series. The scope and structure of the committee are presented in annex 2. Annex 3 lists the documents in preparation within this technical committee and indicates their state of development. The abbreviations used are defined below:

NP means that it is a project to be developed

WD means that the responsible subcommittee exchanges working drafts submitted by the technical experts of their members

CD Committee draft means that from the WD a common draft has been developed and is circulated to all members of the committee for comments. Successive CDs are circulated until technical consensus is recognized by the chairman and secretariat.

DIS is the stage of the draft International Standard prepared on the basis of the CD having received a substantial support (consensus). The DIS is a technical enquiry lasting six months (five in the future) seeking approval of the complete membership of ISO

4. Participation in the work of ISO/TC 207 *Environmental management* and its subcommittees

To date, 66 ISO member bodies participate in the work of ISO/TC 207 and its subcommittees, on which details are given in annex 4. Furthermore, more than 20 international or broadly based regional organizations have been granted liaison status with this technical committee. For example, organizations such as UNCTAD, UNEP, ICC, ITC, OECD, INEM and Consumers International are regularly attending the meetings of ISO/TC 207 and its subsidiary bodies and contribute to the work.

In this context, it should be noted that the members of ISO are the national standards bodies in the various countries. These member bodies coordinate the national input to ISO/TC 207 and appoint national delegations to the committee meetings to ensure a balance among the national interests in the subject under discussion. Accordingly, any individuals, representatives of companies or national organizations who are interested in the work of ISO/TC 207 on the future ISO 14000 series should contact the national standards body in their country in order to gather information on the activities of this technical committee and on the procedure to be followed for participating in the work.

5. Quality System Assessment Recognition (QSAR)

Businesses want to ensure that the ISO 9000 certificate in which they have invested so much to obtain is acceptable to clients everywhere. ISO has been sensitive to the need of ISO 9000 users for *one audit, one certificate – accepted everywhere*. With the IEC, it is committed to setting up a system, known as QSAR (Quality System Assessment Recognition), to encourage the worldwide recognition of ISO 9000 certificates. The recognition of the competence of accreditation bodies will be done in cooperation with the International Accreditation Forum (IAF) in accordance with a Memorandum of Understanding.

Like all ISO's activities, the system will be voluntary. However, QSAR is being established to satisfy a market requirement and the system criteria will be based on documents backed by international consensus among the interested parties. Together, these factors should ensure the success of QSAR.

The following principles will be followed:

- openness to all accreditation bodies worldwide,
- autonomous peer evaluation among accreditation bodies,
- uniform assessment criteria and procedures for all branches of certification bodies, using ISO, IEC or ISO/IEC consensus documents,
- financial autonomy vis-à-vis other ISO and IEC programmes,
- avoidance of conflict of interest in assessment functions,
- use of the ISO/IEC QSAR logo to signify worldwide recognition, and
- balance of the ISO/IEC QSAR Board among accreditation bodies, certification/registration bodies, suppliers and purchasers.

