

Standards and conformance under scrutiny

New Zealand's standards and conformance infrastructure is fundamentally sound and generally supports the government and industry in terms of managing risk to public health, safety and the environment, facilitating economic development and trade. This is according to a consultant's report released for the Ministry of Economic Development late last year. The Ministry commissioned the consultant to undertake a preliminary review of New Zealand's standards and conformance infrastructure to identify any issues that may need to be addressed. It came at a time when a number of other countries had examined their standards and conformance infrastructures that led to evolving developments in their design and operation.

Factors that gave rise to the review included the link between standards, conformance and innovation, increasing trade liberalisation and rapidly changing technology and international regulatory practices. Also included were the more thorny issues of public funding of standards and conformance contribution to government activities and the role that standards and conformance can play in preventing catastrophes such as the recent weather tightness issues in the building industry.

From the report, the Ministry has identified issues of structure and governance, information and education within and about the infrastructure, and resources available to the infrastructure as a whole. The business community are not fully knowledgeable about the standards, accreditation and metrology infrastructure, nor are they aware of the potential benefits the infrastructure can offer. Some regulators have opted to not use the infrastructure to support performance-based regulations. These and other issues identified in the report will be considered further by the Ministry in consultation with stakeholders prior to recommendations being presented to government.