



# Good Environmental Choice Australia

## Assurance Provider Appointment Guidelines

### Version 2.2

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Issued by:

**Good Environmental Choice Australia**

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# Document History

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# Section 1 | Abbreviations and definitions

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## 1.1 Abbreviations

The table below sets out the abbreviations used in this document.

GECA	Good Environmental Choice Australia
GEN	Global Ecolabelling Network
GENICES	Global Ecolabelling Network's Internationally Coordinated Ecolabelling System
IAP	Independent Appointment Panel
ISEAL	International Social and Environmental Accreditation and Labelling Alliance

## 1.2 Definitions, Documents and Processes

### 2.1.1 Definitions

- **Assessor** – the individual performing the assessment as an employee or contractor of the Assurance Provider.
- **Assurance Provider** – Person or organisation appointed by the Independent Appointment Panel performing the conformance assessment as defined by these scheme rules and as per guidance provided by ISO IEC 17065 and the ISEAL Code of Good Practice.
- **GECA Ecolabel Scheme** – The framework, including the processes, by which products become GECA certified.
- **GECA Ecolabel Scheme Rules** – The rules governing how GECA, Assurance providers, applicants and licensees operate under the GECA Scheme.
- **Independent Appointment Panel** – Panel appointing Assurance Providers to the GECA Scheme.

#### **Normative References:**

- Assuring Compliance with Social and Environmental Standards – ISEAL Assurance Code of Good Practice. Version 2.0 – January 2018
- ISO 14024:2018 Environmental Labels and Declarations – Type I Environmental Labelling – Principles and Procedures

#### **Informative References:**

- ISO 17065:2012 Conformity Assessment – Requirements for Bodies Certifying Products, Processes and Services
- ISO 14020:2000 Environmental Labels and Declarations – General Principles



## Section 2 | Overview and Background

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### **2.1 Scope of this document**

The GECA Assurance Provider Appointment Guidelines define how Assurance Providers and Assessors can be accepted under the GECA Scheme. The document details the process to follow and defines roles and responsibilities of GECA, the Assurance Providers as well as an Independent Appointment Panel.

The GECA Assurance Provider Appointment Guidelines are valid in conjunction with the current version of the GECA Scheme Rules. Where conflict arises, the Scheme Rules take precedent.

### **2.2 Background**

The Good Environmental Choice Australia Ecolabel Scheme is managed by Good Environmental Choice Australia (GECA). GECA is a not for profit established to transform the actions of businesses and consumers to drive a substantial increase in the sustainability of consumption and production. One-way GECA achieves this is via developing ecolabelling standards and licensing products against these standards, to allow consumers to choose more sustainable products.

GECA is part of the Global Ecolabelling Network (GEN) and participates in GENICES, the peer review process for GEN member organisations. By implementing the GENICES principles, the GECA Scheme complies with the international norms for ecolabelling ISO 14020 and ISO 14024. In addition, these Assurance Provider Appointment Guidelines refer to ISO 17065.

The Assurance Provider Appointment Guidelines are based on the ISEAL Assurance Code of Good Practice. ISEAL is a global association for credible sustainability standards; their Code of Good Practice defines a framework for credible assurance of such standards.

## Section 3 | **GECA Assurance Provider Appointment Process**

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### 3.1 Process

#### Application

- Assurance Provider enquires about GECA assessment
- GECA sends application form
- Assurance Provider consults GECA Assurance Provider Appointment Guidelines, section 4 to ensure they meet the necessary qualification requirements
- Assurance Provider completes application form
- Assurance Provider pays application and assessment fee



#### Assessment of Qualifications

- Independent Appointment Panel reviews application form and qualifications of Assurance Provider; as part of this process, Assurance Provider nominates specific Assessors who will participate in GECA professional development
- Independent Appointment Panel makes decision about assessment of Assurance Provider



#### Induction Training

- Nominated Assessors participate in an induction training offered by GECA covering knowledge around GECA standards



#### Acceptance of Assurance Provider for GECA Scheme

- GECA issues contract and certificate to Assurance Provider, valid for three years



#### Continuing Professional Development

- Assessors participate in annual continuing professional development courses offered by GECA





#### Witness Assessments

- GECA shall witness at least one site assessment a year by accompanying each Assurance Provider and review all assessment reports to produce a yearly report to the IAP for approval of ongoing quality



#### Annual Check Point

- The IAP shall review at least one assessment from each Assurance Provider annually and meet with each assurance provider at least once a year to provide feedback.



#### Re-assessment of Assurance Provider

- After three years, the Independent Appointment Panel re-assesses the Assurance Provider based on Assessor qualifications (see section 4), performance of Assessors during witness assessments and Assessors' participation in professional development courses offered by GECA
- Independent Appointment Panel makes decision about re-assessment of Assurance Provider
- GECA issues contract and certificate to Assurance Provider, valid for three years

### 3.2 Application

Applications can be submitted by Assurance Providers. The assurance provider is responsible for ensuring an internal quality management system for all Assessors conducting assessments against the GECA Scheme.

The assessment fee structure is defined in the Assurance Provider Pricing Schedule.

### 3.3 Assessment of Qualifications and Acceptance of Assurance Provider for GECA Scheme

The Independent Appointment Panel (see section 5) reviews the application of the Assurance Provider. As part of this process, the Assurance Provider nominates specific Assessors to be acknowledged under the GECA Scheme and lists their qualifications.

By following the processes detailed in section 5, the Independent Appointment Panel makes a decision on the appointment of the Assurance Provider.

If the assessment is successful, GECA issues a contract and certificate to the Assurance Provider, valid for three years. They are also entitled to use a logo stating that they are a "GECA approved assessor". This logo is only to be used during the time they are an approved Assurance Provider and will need to cease use of logo within seven days if the





approval is terminated or does not get reappointed. The brand guidelines associated with this logo use must also be adhered.

If the Assurance Provider does not meet the necessary requirements, the non-conformance process should be followed as per section 5.2. An applicant who is unable to close out the non-conformances in the specified periods is able to re-apply to the Scheme six months after the final report is provided to the Assurance Provider and GECA.

### **3.4 Training and Continuing Professional Development**

GECA offers training courses to the Assurance Providers and Assessors. The mandatory courses shall be attended by all appointed Assurance Providers. There shall be no more than three mandatory training sessions run by GECA per year. Voluntary courses may be offered in addition. GECA shall monitor the attendance of each assurance provider at each training sessions. These may be used to demonstrate ongoing professional development and training in the GECA Scheme at witness assessments.

Any communication received from GECA, which is of relevance to an assessor should be passed on by the AP.

The courses may be offered as webinars, face-to-face or on an individual basis.

The first training should cover

- the principles of the GECA Scheme,
- ISO 14020 and 14024 – Type I ecolabelling,
- the role of the Global Ecolabelling Network,
- ecolabels and sustainability standards: typical hot spots,
- GECA's standards: overview of all standards; updates on changes and new developments as required.

The other trainings should cover

- GECA's standards: overview of all standards; updates on changes and new developments as required.
- Any clarification on matters identified by GECA during the period since previous training
- Any other matters as required by the Assurance Providers

### **3.5 Review of Assessments (witness site assessment and check point)**

As part of ongoing quality control, the IAP shall review a random selection of assessments of each Assurance Provider annually.

Site assessments should be part of the assessments conducted by the Assurance Provider, GECA shall witness at least one per year, per Assurance Provider.

GECA is to be granted access to all documents that are part of the assessment. GECA may ask questions for clarification but may not influence the work of the Assurance Provider / Assessor.



GECA shall provide a report based on the findings of the witness assessments and present this to the IAP. The IAP shall review the report and interview the GECA witness and a representative of the Assurance Provider (if required).

If the Assurance Provider does not meet the necessary quality requirements during a witness assessment,

- the assessment has to be improved to a standard in alignment with the GECA Scheme Rules and the non-conformance process outlined in section 5.2;
- the IAP may witness an additional assessment; and
- in case of severe fault, the appointment of the Assurance Provider under the GECA Scheme may be withdrawn.

### **3.6 Re-assessment of assurance provider**

After three years, the Independent Appointment Panel re-assesses the Assurance Provider based on Assessor qualifications (see section 4), performance of Assessors during witness assessments and Assessors' participation in professional development courses offered by GECA.



## Section 4 | Assessor and Assurance Provider Qualifications

Assurance Providers shall have the following formal qualifications in order to be appointed to the GECA Scheme:

<p>Education and professional experience:</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Tertiary education (college or university qualification) in a relevant discipline (e.g. environmental science, engineering, chemistry, ecology); and</li> <li>2. Five years of professional experience (e.g., auditing, environmental science, chemistry, consultancy, research) in a relevant discipline (e.g., environmental science, science, engineering, chemistry, ecology);</li> </ol> <p><b>OR</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Secondary education (high school certificate); and</li> <li>2. Ten years professional experience as listed above.</li> </ol>
<p>Assurance provider training:</p>	<p>One assessor per team or the organisation:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Registered Exemplar Global Environmental Management Systems Auditor status or equivalent, or</li> <li>2. Completion of an Exemplar Global accredited ISO 14001:2015 Environmental Lead Auditor Course or Accreditation to ISO 17065</li> </ol> <p>Otherwise:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Successful completion (with certificate) of an IRCA1 registered “ISO management standard assessor course”, or</li> <li>4. ISO 19011 course on auditing techniques.</li> </ol>
<p>GECA training:</p>	<p>Successful completion of initial and annual ongoing training (as defined in section 3.4) dependent on changes in the GECA system relevant to the respective scope due to new or revised normative documents, or other relevant amendments such as interpretations.</p>

Assurance Providers and Assessors shall act in accordance with the ISEAL Assurance Code of Good Practice. In particular, Assurance Providers:

- Shall be legally incorporated entities.
- Shall have legally enforceable contracts with their clients.
- Shall conduct annual internal audits on scheme-related performance and share the results with GECA.
- Shall be up to date with their professional development courses.



- Shall implement an ongoing program for assessor and assurance personnel calibration.
- Shall have a system in place where they internally evaluate the competency of their Assessors against GECA requirements on a regular basis.
- Shall have practices implemented to mitigate risks to impartiality and conflict of interest.
- Shall have a publicly available appeals procedure.
- Shall have professional indemnity insurance of an amount reasonable to cover potential losses arising from assessing products and services against the GECA Scheme.
- Shall have and follow an internal policy outlining how independence of assessment and decision making is maintained.
- Shall have and follow an internal policy regarding the hiring processes to ensure qualified and experienced Assessors are employed.

The Independent Appointment Panel shall require evidence of the above to commence assessment.



# Section 5 | Independent Appointment Panel

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The Independent Appointment Panel (IAP) appoints Assurance Providers to the GECA Scheme. As part of this process, the IAP checks qualifications of Assurance Providers and individual Assessors.

The IAP acts as an oversight body in alignment with ISEAL's Code of Good Practice guidelines. Thus, the IAP ensures an independent oversight and decision-making mechanism within the GECA Assurance Provider appointment process. Transparency shall be maintained in all decisions.

All information and documentation received by the IAP, Assurance Providers, Assessors or GECA during the appointment process shall be treated as confidential.

## **5.1 Tasks of the IAP**

- Review and assessment of Assurance Provider and Assessor qualifications
- Appointment and re-appointment of Assurance Providers to the GECA Scheme
- Operate as part of the oversight mechanism according to ISEAL Code of Good Practice Section 5.4, 5.5.1 - 5.5.4, 5.6.1-5.6.4 and in particular, reviewing the assurance providers in line with Section 5.1.2.
- Conflict resolution
- Review of witness assessments report, as required, and managing non-conformances
- Annual review including face-to-face meetings with Assurance Providers
- Participation in review of Scheme Rules
- Evaluation of own governance process in consultation and cooperation with GECA's Scheme
- Reporting to the GECA Board the status and outcomes relating to applicant and appointed assurance providers

## **5.2 Appointment Decision Making**

The IAP reviews the application of the Assurance Provider against the requirements of Section 4 of this document.

Following a successful initial review, the Assurance Provider shall be appointed an interim assessor. The Assurance Provider shall conduct one full assessment for a GECA client against the GECA Ecolabel Scheme. This assessment shall be presented to the IAP for review. Following a successful review, the Assurance Provider shall be appointed a GECA Assurance Provider. A trademark licence agreement, logo and certificate shall be provided by GECA to the Assurance Provider, valid for the period of three years, subject to successful completion of annual reviews.

Where non-conformances are raised against the Assurance Provider, the IAP shall provide a full non-conformance report to both GECA and the Assurance Provider. Minor non-conformances shall be closed out within 90 days and major non-conformances shall be closed out within 30 days. An Assurance Provider with a major non-conformance raised at



any stage of the appointment cycle or review assessment shall not conduct any assessments against the GECA Scheme until the non-conformance is successfully closed out.

Failure to close out non-conformances within this time frame shall result in the suspension of the Assurance Provider from the GECA Scheme. If the non-conformances remain open beyond 30 days after suspension, the Assurance Provider shall be terminated from assessing against the GECA Scheme.

Non-conformance close out assessments shall be charged at an hourly rate by GECA to the Assurance Provider at a rate of \$290 + GST per hour.

Assessment reports of both successful and unsuccessful Assurance Providers shall be provided to the Assurance Provider, GECA management and the GECA Board at the end of the appointment assessment.

### **5.3 Members of the IAP**

- The IAP is a sub-committee of the GECA board
- The committee shall consist of at least two members.
- The IAP shall be led by the Chair, a member of the IAP who shall be elected by the IAP for a period of at least one year. Any Member may be elected.
- The IAP should report on all relevant matters to GECA board
- The GECA board is the ultimate decision-maker on matters related to the IAP. A quorum requires three members of the board.
- Members shall be appointed for a period of three years, however there is no limit to the maximum number of re-appointments.
- In order to avoiding conflict of interest in the IAP, Assurance Providers registered with or applying to the GECA Scheme shall not be appointed to the panel or the GECA Board.
- GECA management shall ensure that IAP members have in-depth knowledge of the standards and their intent, and of the Scheme's assurance requirements.

### **5.4 Meetings**

At least one review meeting and one governance meeting shall be held per year. Both meetings can be held at the same time. Other meetings may be held on an as need basis, with a maximum of four meetings per year, unless exceptional circumstances arise. Some out of session decisions may be required, particularly regarding new applicants.

### **5.5 Appeals**

Appeals against decisions made by the IAP shall be lodged to the IAP chair for investigation with the IAP. The results of the investigation and the original appeal shall be escalated to the GECA Board within one month of the lodgement of the appeal. The GECA Board shall make the final decision regarding the appeal.



# Section 6 | Roles and Expectations of an Assurance Provider

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## 6.1 Scheme rules

Assurance Providers should have knowledge of and adhere to the current GECA Ecolabel Scheme rules.





## 6.2 Process and touch points

Assurance Providers are responsible for ensuring good and regular communication with a client.







The bullet points below explain the minimum touch points / communication that an Assurance Provider or an assessor is expected to have with a client.

### APPLICATION STAGE

#### TOUCH POINTS

-  When a quote request is received by Assurance Provider
-  When a quotation is sent to client
-  When a quote is accepted by client
-  When an assessor is appointed (include conformance assessment plan).





### Conformance Assessment

-  Ongoing communication between client and assessor
-  Desktop audit date and process
-  Onsite audit date and process
-  Assessment report
-  Non-Conformance
-  Certificate of conformance.

From the moment a quote request has been received to the issuing of the Certificate of Conformance, ongoing touch points should take place by phone and/ or email. GECA recommend a minimum of communication as described in the paragraphs below

#### 6.2.1 Application stage

As soon as a Quote Request has been received by the Assurance Provider, they should:

-  Call the client to inform them that their request has been received, ensuring that the information stated in the quote request is correct and request more information as required.
-  Re-explain the process for certification, timeline\*, fee and payment schedule and any other relevant information.
-  Discuss availability for a desktop audit and onsite audit.
-  Issue their quote via the GECA portal within 5 working days of receiving the quote request.

*\*GECA recommends that each quote supplied by the assurance provider should have a validity of 6 months maximum. This means that if an applicant doesn't sign the quote within 6 months they will have to reapply.*





As soon as a quote has been accepted by a client, the Assurance Provider should:

- ☎ Communicate with the client to inform them that an assessor will be allocated to their assessment.
- ☎ Re-explain the next steps for assessment and GECA certification.
- ☎ Discuss any payment required.

*GECA recommends that the Assurance Provider charge a deposit prior to the commencement of the assessment, explaining that no refund will be given for not completing the assessment in time or for failing an assessment. GECA is not responsible for non-payment from the client as the contract is made directly between the AP and the client.*

The allocated assessor should:

- ☎ Contact the client to introduce themselves and prebook a date for the desktop review and onsite assessment. They should explain that if the date is cancelled or postponed, they might not be able to reschedule in a short timeframe and this will depend on the assessor availability.
- ☎ The assessor should issue a Conformance Assessment Plan (CAP). Please refer to the GECA scheme rules for details of this plan. This plan needs to include a maximum duration for the audit\*. It needs to be reviewed and agreed by the client prior to start of the assessment.

*\*GECA recommends that the conformance assessment plan include a maximum duration for the length of the assessment of 18 months.*

*This means that if an applicant doesn't sign the quote within 6 months or has not completed their assessment within 18 months they may have to reapply, and this may generate an additional cost. This should be clearly noted in the quotation.*

### 6.2.1 Conformance Assessment Stage

The date of the desktop review should be agreed and followed as per the CAP.

The process should be re-explained to the client including, but not limited to, the issuing of non-conformances, issuing of final assessment report, issuing of CoC and the difference between a CoC and GECA certificate.

During the assessment a client should be able to contact their assessor and assurance provider when required and vice versa.

If there has been no activity by the client in progressing with their assessment, the Assurance Provider or assessor is responsible to contact the applicant in order to get an update on the advancement of their audit. This will ensure there are minimal delays to the desktop and onsite date. The Assurance Provider needs to contact the GECA account manager and let them know of any issues concerning any delays.

The assessor should add a note in the dedicated section of the assessment listing to indicate the advancement of the assessment. This will help centralise the information and make it available to GECA, the Assurance Provider and the assessors.

The Assurance Provider needs to send their Conformance Report and Certificate to GECA (Account Manager) for our Standards and Technical team to review and approve. Once approved, the assurance provider can then issue the CoC via the portal.





### **6.3 Communication**

Communication with a client and minimum touch points are described in section 6.2.

One point of contact from each Assurance Provider should be allocated to GECA. Each Assurance Provider should coordinate all assessment advancements and request for its organisation.

GECA should only liaise directly with an assessor under exceptional circumstances.

### **6.4 Participation**

The Assurance Provider should participate, as a minimum, in the meetings as described in the below:

Monthly catch up (once per month)

Feedback sessions (every quarter) - The feedback sessions organised by GECA are not mandatory, but it is highly encouraged for the Assurance Providers and assessors to participate.

A minimum of one training session per year (if there are significant changes to the scheme or standards or processes there may be additional training required)

Standard development and Technical Advisory Groups

Participation in ongoing feedback sessions, working groups and seminars as they arise – not mandatory but highly recommended.

Review of standards during development: participation in TAGs and public comment stage

### **6.5 Development of guidance documents:**

The Assurance Provider should assist GECA in the development of any guideline documents as requested by assessors or licensees. This could be to review documents created by GECA before being published or to create a document that will then be reviewed by GECA.



## Section 7 | **Validity of GECA Assurance Provider Appointment Guidelines**

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GECA shall review these Assurance Provider Appointment Guidelines every three years together with the GECA Scheme Rules and follow the same process as outlined in the Scheme Rules.

Small amendments may be made between review periods and all approved and current Assurance Providers will be notified.



# Appendix 1 | Contact Details

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## Good Environmental Choice Australia (GECA)

OFFICE	Street address	Level 32, 101 Miller Street, North Sydney NSW 2060
	Phone	+61 (0) 2 9699 2850
	Email	<a href="mailto:info@geca.org.au">info@geca.org.au</a>
	Website	<a href="http://www.geca.eco">www.geca.eco</a>