



Canadian
Consumer Initiative

L'Initiative canadienne
des consommateurs

Parliamentary Briefing Note

Prepared by Union des consommateurs for the Canadian Consumer Initiative

November 2011

Adequate representation of consumers in the standardization process

The Issue

Standardization is a process undertaken to establish requirements and criteria that must be met by a product, service or process in order to ensure that it can be used safely and effectively. Over the years, standards have been adopted nationally and internationally to ensure, for example, that devices and equipment are safe, compatible with the systems in which they are intended to be used, and of good quality.

Today standards are relied upon in many areas. Standardization affects management, environmental protection, privacy and health protection, work organization, service delivery, and dispute settlement, to name just a few areas. In the context of globalization, whereby states are encouraged to lighten the burden of regulations on companies in order to satisfy market imperatives, standardization is presented as a solution complementary to regulations, or even as an alternative solution.

Accordingly, in Canada and elsewhere, standardization is becoming more important as a regulatory tool. Regulation products, services and processes in social, economic, environmental and other areas are also becoming more important.

The legitimacy of standards becomes crucial in this context; it tends to be based on transparency during the creation phase and on the balance achieved between various competing interests on standardization committees. A similar balancing of voices is required within national and international standardization organizations. Unfortunately, one voice that is under-represented in the standardization process is that of consumers.

The member organizations of CCI believe that national and international authorities in the field of standardization must clarify the criteria that will allow a better representation of consumers, in terms of the quality and competence of representatives, and their expected transparency and accountability.

In this regard, please refer to the CCI briefing note submitted last year¹ on the theme of consumer representation, as the recommendations in that note are also relevant for government and standardization authorities.

CCI member groups believe it would be both pertinent and desirable for the stakeholders in standardization, namely the Standards Council of Canada (SCC) and the four Standard—Developing Organizations², to collaborate with consumer

1. *For a better representation of Canadian Consumers*, CCI Parliamentary Briefing Note, March 2010, <http://cci-icc.ca/CCI-pdf/CCI-EN-consumer-rep.pdf>

2. These include CSA Standards, Bureau de normalisation du Québec (BNQ), Underwriters Laboratories of Canada (ULC) and Canadian General Standards Board.

THE CANADIAN CONSUMER INITIATIVE is a coalition of four major Canadian consumer organizations: Consumers Council of Canada, Option consommateurs, Public Interest Advocacy Centre and Union des consommateurs.

L'INITIATIVE CANADIENNE DES CONSOMMATEURS est une coalition formée des plus importantes associations de consommateurs au Canada, soit le Conseil des consommateurs, le Centre pour la défense de l'intérêt public, Option consommateurs et l'Union des consommateurs.

CONTACT: Steven Staples, Communications Consultant/Consultant en communications, Institut RIDEAU Institute, 63 Sparks, Suite 608, Ottawa, ON K1P 5A6 CANADA t. 613-565-4994 ext/poste 24 fax/télécopieur 613-249-7091 e. operations@rideauinstitute.ca

Canadian Consumer Initiative—Adequate representation of consumers in the standardization process

groups in order to further the discussion begun by Union des consommateurs regarding the creation of a consumer organization specializing in standardization issues.

Given the pervasive problem of consumer under-representation, CCI member groups believe it is relevant – and urgent – to bring the consumer movement closer to the world of standardization.

CCI agrees with the steps proposed by Union des consommateurs in its study on this subject³, namely, that an approach should be developed that would allow for the exploration of representation in the standardization process and the establishment of a continuous dialogue between the stakeholders on the issue of better consumer participation in standardization processes.

Recommendations

CCI recommends that the Canadian consumer movement and standardization organizations work collaboratively to devise a framework that would establish a new consumer organization specializing in standardization. The following first steps should be taken:

- determining the composition of a coordinating committee that would be assigned to develop a detailed implementation plan, a governance model, and a funding plan, as well as to coordinate the holding of a stakeholders' meeting that would lead to the validation of the chosen governance model and determine next steps that should be taken
- determining the composition of a coordinating committee that would be tasked with forming an information and discussion network that could serve the needs of consumer associations and standardization organizations, and to develop a funding plan for that network

In addition, CCI recommends that the Canadian government and standardization organizations earmark funding for work in preparation of these first suggested steps and for coordination of this project.

For further information:

Charles Tanguay
Head of Communications
Union des consommateurs
Tel.: (514) 521 – 6820, ext. 257
tanguay@consommateur.qc.ca

Union des consommateurs received funding from Industry Canada's Contributions Program for Non-profit Consumer and Voluntary Organizations. The views expressed in this report are not necessarily those of Industry Canada or of the Government of Canada.

3. *The Voice of Consumers in Standardization*, Feasibility Study, Union des consommateurs, June 2011, <http://consommateur.qc.ca/union-des-consommateurs/docu/norm/StandardizationFeasibilityStudy.pdf>