



Multilateral Recognition Agreements (MLAs) /Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRAs)

MLAs/MRAs are useful tools for policy makers, regulators, industry and conformity assessment bodies (CABs). Despite their popularity, many people are not familiar with the differences between MRAs or MLAs, and how organizations and regulators may benefit from such agreements. Outlined below is a quick lesson on these agreements.

What is an MLA

ISO/IEC Guide 2, Standardization and related activities -- General vocabulary, defines an MLA as a "...recognition arrangement that covers the acceptance of each other's results by more than two parties" (ISO/IEC Guide 2, p.62). MLAs are voluntary agreements among accreditation bodies that operate on the basis of the recognition of technical equivalency among signatories. It ensures that procedures meet the requirements of a given standard. An MLA is also a confidence building mechanism as it helps to ensure the competence of CABs in economies importing into the Canadian market, and vice versa.

What is an MRA¹

The development of voluntary MLAs is mirrored by government-to-government MRAs. MRAs are legally binding, negotiated agreements between governments based on specific regulated products. For example, an MRA allows products such as telecommunications equipment in Canada to be tested and certified here to the export market requirements before the product is shipped (Telecommunications Industry Association, MRA Briefs, p. 2).

Benefits of MLAs/MRAs

Despite the differences between the two, there are many common benefits. These include:

- Reducing barriers to trade.
- Increasing Canadian exporters' access to foreign markets.
- Providing manufacturers with an opportunity to test and certify products one time to the requirements of multiple markets.
- Reducing costs and delays associated with duplicate testing of products.
- Ensuring that an accreditation body's program is re-evaluated regularly against best practices.

Overall these agreements lower the costs of doing business, and reduce the burden on both industry and regulatory agencies, thereby facilitating trade. MLAs/MRAs do not require signatory countries to

¹ Some voluntary standardization organizations use the term MRA to describe their agreements.

harmonize their standards or regulations. Instead, these agreements develop closer and stronger relationships among regulatory authorities and CABs.

Ensuring Canadian Interests

Two action items in the Canada Standards Strategy (CSS) promote the participation of the SCC in new MLAs (CSS #8 *Move towards a global accreditation regime*); and the development of a framework for entering into MRAs, and ensure that MLA/MRA-related information is available to all interested stakeholders (CSS #9 *Identify and make available to stakeholders the objectives and strategies underlying trade-related MRAs*).

To ensure that these agreements reflect Canadian trade interests and regulatory objectives, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAIT) and the Standards Council have developed criteria for undertaking new negotiations and enhancing existing agreements. The Standards Council's framework provides guidance on entering into voluntary MLAs while the DFAIT framework focuses on government-to-government MRA activities. Both frameworks emphasize – *consistency* between existing regulatory and voluntary agreements, and *consultation and communication* with stakeholders.

The Standards Council framework is available by contacting ebruce@scc.ca. A copy of the DFAIT document, *A policy framework for Mutual Recognition Activity*, is available from the WTO Web site (<http://www.wto.org> Document Number G/TBT/W/167).

Canada as a Signatory

Over the past few years, the number of new agreements has grown, and listed on the Standards Council Web site (http://www.scc.ca/igat/mra_e.pdf) is an international agreements listing of the over 23 agreements where Canada is a signatory.

Web-site Linkages

European Union – MRAs: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/international/indexb1.htm>

DFAIT – Trade and Negotiations: <http://www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/tna-nac/>

Health Products Food Branch (Health Canada) – Background on MRAs covering drug/medicinal products: http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hpfb-dgpsa/inspectorate/background_e.html

Telecommunications Industry Association – MRA Basics:

<http://www.tiaonline.org/policy/MRAbasics.pdf>