International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation

The ILAC Mutual Recognition Arrangement

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Testing – Calibration – Inspection

Enhancing the acceptance of products and services across national borders

Removing barriers to global trade

Accreditation allows you to make an informed decision when selecting an organisation to carry out your testing, calibration, or inspection activities, as it demonstrates competence, impartiality and capability of that organisation. As a result, accreditation helps to underpin the credibility, safety and performance of goods and services.

Accreditation bodies around the world, which have been evaluated by peers as competent, have signed an arrangement that enhances the acceptance of products and services across national borders. The purpose of this arrangement, the ILAC Mutual Recognition Arrangement (MRA), (often referred to as the ILAC Arrangement) is to create an international framework to support international trade through the removal of technical barriers.

“Tested or inspected once, accepted everywhere”

In many economies there is an accreditation body recognised by government and industry to carry out the assessment and verification against international standards of testing, calibration, inspection and certification activities in both the private and public sectors.

ILAC, is an organisation that counts as its members laboratory accreditation bodies, regional organizations and stakeholders representing over 110 economies. The ILAC MRA allows you to make use of a global network of testing and calibration laboratories and inspection bodies that have been accredited to provide accurate and reliable results.

The MRA supports international trade by promoting international confidence and acceptance of data generated by accredited laboratories and inspection bodies. Technical barriers to trade, such as the retesting or inspection of products each time they enter a new economy would be reduced. For example, the MRA supports international trade by helping regulators to recognize and accept data that is driven by regulatory or public policy frameworks in sectors such as health, environment and others.

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How does the MRA benefit you?

For Government – The MRA provides governments with a credible and technically robust framework on which to further develop and enhance government to government bilateral and multilateral international trade agreements. The long-term aim is the fully accepted use and recognition, by both public and private industries, of inspection bodies and accredited laboratories, including results from accredited laboratories and inspection bodies in other countries. In this way, the free-trade goal of “a product tested or inspected once, accepted everywhere” will be realised.

For Regulators – The MRA acts as an internationally recognised ‘stamp of approval’ to demonstrate compliance against agreed standards and requirements. Consequently, risk is minimised, as decisions will be based on reliable results. Duplication is also minimised as test, calibration and inspection data included in submissions for product approvals can be evaluated without re-testing and re-inspection. Many specifiers, such as government agencies, have recognised the importance of credible accreditation programs that are developed against internationally recognised standards. Accreditation and the ILAC MRA help regulators meet their own legislated responsibilities by providing a globally recognised system to accept accredited test and inspection reports. Examples of how the ILAC MRA benefits Regulators can be found at **publicsectorassurance.org**

For Industry users – The MRA ensures that businesses that depend on test, calibration and inspection data have greater confidence in the accuracy of the test, calibration and inspection reports they purchase, because they have been generated by facilities assessed as being competent to carry out these specific activities. Users should check the current scope of the laboratory and inspection bodys accreditation when purchasing such services.

For Manufacturers – The MRA ensures that manufacturing businesses can derive significant savings. Rather than bearing the costs of setting up internal assessments to confirm the quality of the testing, calibration and inspection results on their products, businesses can choose to defer to the assessments of internationally recognised competent accreditation bodies that are ILAC signatories, and in addition benefit from the market access the ILAC MRA provides.

For Consumers – The MRA provides additional confidence to the general public and consumers purchasing testing, calibration and inspection services on their sample, instrument or product. By insisting that the calibration, test, or inspection results are from an accredited facility, they can be confident the facility has been assessed by an independent accreditation body, that itself has been recognised as meeting international standards of competence.

How does the MRA work?

Acceptance of an accreditation body into the ILAC MRA is dependent upon being successfully evaluated by peers from other accreditation bodies in accordance with the relevant rules and procedures contained in ILAC publications. Each accreditation body that is a signatory to the ILAC MRA commits to:

- Maintain conformity with the current version of ISO/IEC 17011 *Conformity assessment – General requirements for bodies providing assessment and accreditation of conformity assessment bodies and supplementary requirements* documents.
- Ensure that all laboratories and inspection bodies that are accredited comply with appropriate laboratory and inspection bodies standards (currently ISO/IEC 17025 *General requirements for the competence of testing and calibration laboratories*, ISO 15189 *Medical laboratories – Requirements for quality and competence,* and ISO/IEC 17020 *Conformity assessment – Requirements for the operation of various types of bodies performing inspection*).

The ILAC MRA has been structured to build on existing and developing regional MRAs established around the world. Regional Cooperation Bodies who are operating a regional MRA, coordinate peer evaluations and thereby maintain confidence in the accreditation bodies that are signatories to the regional MRA.

In turn, each Regional Cooperation Body, that has been recognised by ILAC, must also abide by ILAC's procedures and requirements and undergo routine peer evaluations by the members of another Regional Cooperation Body or ILAC.

Currently, the European cooperation for Accreditation (EA), the Asia Pacific Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (APLAC) and the Inter-American Accreditation Cooperation (IAAC) are recognised regional bodies of ILAC. This means that the mutual recognition arrangements (MRAs) and evaluation procedures of EA, APLAC and IAAC have been peer evaluated by ILAC and demonstrated competence in maintaining and managing an MRA. Recognised Regional Cooperations are re-evaluated every 4 years.

Accreditation Bodies who are Associate Members of ILAC and a signatory to the MRA of a recognised region are automatically eligible to become signatories to the ILAC MRA.

Accreditation bodies that cannot be a member of an ILAC recognized region (for geographical reasons) may apply directly to ILAC for evaluation in order to achieve signatory status to the ILAC MRA.

How does the MRA work? *continued*

The Southern African Development Community in Accreditation (SADCA), the Arab Accreditation Cooperation (ARAC) and the African Accreditation Cooperation (AFRAC) are in the process of developing their respective MRAs and their associated evaluation procedures before seeking recognition with ILAC.

The end result of this network of mutual recognition, is that test reports and calibration certificates as well as inspection reports issued by facilities accredited by a signatory to the ILAC MRA, will be accepted by the other signatories to the ILAC MRA and many cases by government regulators and industry.

ILAC-MRA Mark

All ILAC Full Members (MRA signatories) are able to enter into an agreement with ILAC to use the ILAC MRA Mark in combination with their own accreditation body Symbol (otherwise known as a Combined MRA Mark).

The accredited laboratories and inspection bodies of ILAC Full Members that have signed an agreement with ILAC for the use of the ILAC MRA Mark are able to use the Accredited CAB Combined ILAC MRA Mark. This allows these facilities to provide an instantly recognizable link to the ILAC MRA on their reports and certificates containing the results of calibration, testing and inspections carried out under the scope of their accreditation.

Use of the Combined MRA Mark (used by accreditation bodies) and the Accredited CAB Combined MRA Mark (used by laboratories and inspection bodies) is however not mandatory and therefore laboratory and inspection reports and certificates, from accredited laboratories and inspection bodies, may be seen with or without the Accredited CAB Combined MRA Mark.

How does the MRA work? *continued*

Accreditation Bodies using the Combined MRA Mark, receive the benefits of being able to readily promote their international recognition status, and of being able to provide the same opportunity to their accredited laboratories and inspection bodies. Accredited laboratories and inspection bodies, using the Accredited CAB Combined MRA Mark on their test/calibration and inspection reports, are in turn able to receive the benefits of promoting their accreditation as being internationally recognised.

Maintaining the integrity of the MRA

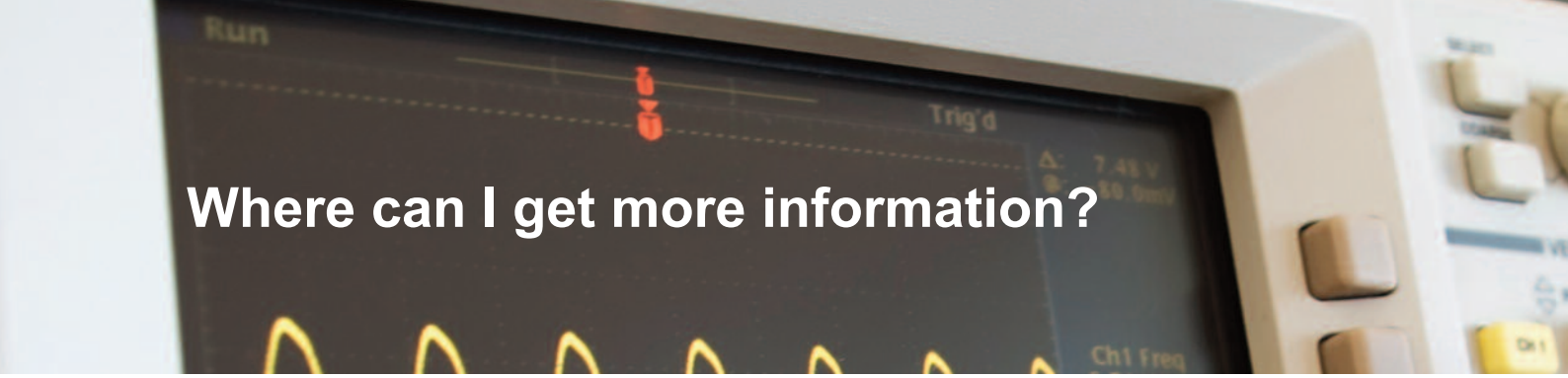
In order to maintain the value and integrity of the MRA, all signatories have agreed to notify ILAC about any significant changes including:

- the status or operation of the accreditation body
- changes in name or legal/corporate status
- the establishment, revision, suspension or termination of any agreements
- changes in key senior staff or the organisational structure.

Each signatory to the MRA must also designate a liaison officer to ensure a consistent and effective channel of communication between the accreditation bodies.

Summary

The MRA promotes trust and builds confidence among accreditation bodies through their ability to determine a laboratory and inspection body's competence to carry out testing, calibrations and inspections. In turn, this confidence facilitates the acceptance of testing, calibration and inspection results between economies when the results can be demonstrated to have originated from accredited laboratories and inspection bodies. The MRA supports global trade by removing a technical barrier to trade in the form of retesting and re-inspection every time a product enters a new market. This cuts time and cost for industry, and supports regulatory and public policy frameworks. ILAC is committed to its goal of achieving the principle of products and services being "tested or inspected once, accepted everywhere".



Where can I get more information?

ILAC facilitates trade and supports regulators by operating a worldwide mutual recognition arrangement – the ILAC Arrangement – among Accreditation Bodies (ABs) in order that the data and test results issued by laboratories and inspection bodies, collectively known as Conformity Assessment Bodies (CABs), accredited by ILAC Accreditation Body members are accepted globally. Thereby, technical barriers to trade, such as the re-testing of products each time they enter a new economy is reduced, in support of realising the free-trade goal of "accredited once, accepted everywhere".

In addition, accreditation reduces risk for business and its customers by assuring that accredited CABs are competent to carry out the work they undertake within their scope of accreditation.

Further, the results from accredited facilities are used extensively by regulators for the public benefit in the provision of services that promote an unpolluted environment, safe food, clean water, energy, health and social care services.

ABs that are members of ILAC and the CABs they accredit are required to comply with appropriate international standards and the applicable ILAC application documents for the consistent application of those standards.

ILAC is the global association for the accreditation of laboratories, inspection bodies, proficiency testing providers and reference material producers, with a membership consisting of accreditation bodies and stakeholder organisations throughout the world.

It is a representative organisation that is involved with:

- the development of accreditation practices and procedures,
- the promotion of accreditation as a trade facilitation tool,
- supporting the provision of local and national services,
- the assistance of developing accreditation systems,
- the recognition of competent testing (including medical) and calibration laboratories, inspection bodies, proficiency testing providers and reference material producers around the world.

ILAC actively cooperates with other relevant international organisations in pursuing these aims.

ABs having signed the ILAC Arrangement are subject to peer evaluation via formally established and recognised regional cooperation bodies using ILAC rules and procedures prior to becoming a signatory to the ILAC Arrangement.

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The ILAC website provides a range of information on topics covering accreditation, conformity assessment, trade facilitation, as well as the contact details of members. Further information to illustrate the value of accredited conformity assessment to regulators and the public sector through case studies and independent research can also be found at: **www.publicsectorassurance.org.**

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https://www.youtube.com/user/IAFandILAC

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