



**Certified Once  
Accepted Everywhere**

# The IAF Multilateral Recognition Arrangement (MLA)



# Supporting the acceptance of goods and services across national borders

Accreditation provides an assurance to government, business and the consumer that organisations providing certification to a standard have the required competence and impartiality to do so as evidenced by fulfillment of international standards and requirements. Accreditation helps to underpin the credibility and performance of goods and services.

Accreditation bodies around the world, which have been evaluated by peers as competent, have signed an arrangement, the IAF Multilateral Recognition Arrangement (MLA), that enhances the acceptance of goods and services across national borders.

The purpose of the MLA, is to ensure mutual recognition of accredited certification between signatories to the MLA, and subsequently acceptance of accredited certification in many markets based on one accreditation.

Accreditations granted by IAF MLA signatories are recognised worldwide based on their equivalent accreditation programs, therefore reducing costs and adding value to business and consumers.



## Removing technical barriers to trade

In many economies there is an accreditation body recognised by government to carry out the assessment and accreditation of certification bodies against international standards in both the private and public sectors.

The International Accreditation Forum (IAF) is a global association of accreditation bodies, certification body associations and other organisations involved in conformity assessment activities in a variety of fields including management systems, products, personnel and validation and verification. The IAF MLA, with members in over 50 economies, provides an assurance that equivalent certification bodies in other countries operate to the same standard as those in their own country.

The MLA contributes to the freedom of world trade by eliminating technical barriers. IAF works to find the most effective way of achieving a single system to achieve the objective: **“Certified once, accepted everywhere”**

# How does the IAF MLA benefit you?



**For Government** – The IAF MLA provides governments with a credible and 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 accredited certification, including certificates from other countries. In this way, the free-trade goal of “**certified once, accepted everywhere**” will be realised.

**For Regulators** – The IAF MLA represents 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 certificates. Many specifiers, such as government agencies, have recognised the importance of credible accreditation programs that are developed against internationally recognised standards. Accreditation and the IAF MLA help regulators meet their own legislated responsibilities by providing a globally recognised system to accept accredited certification.

**For Business** – The IAF MLA provides businesses that are procuring goods and services with greater confidence. Businesses can therefore select suppliers from further afield in the knowledge that they will receive goods and services that conform to a recognised standard.

**For Manufacturers** – Having products assessed and certified as conforming to a particular standard allows manufacturers and service providers to distinguish themselves from less reputable suppliers, thereby creating a competitive advantage.

The IAF MLA ensures that standards, specifications and conformity assessment methods are the same, allowing one accredited certificate to be recognised around the world. This lowers the cost of accredited certification and reduces the risk of goods or services being rejected by international trading partners.

**For Consumers** – Goods and services that have been assessed creates consumer confidence. The IAF MLA ensures that such goods and services placed on the market, from which ever country of origin, meet standards of quality and safety.



## How does the MLA work?

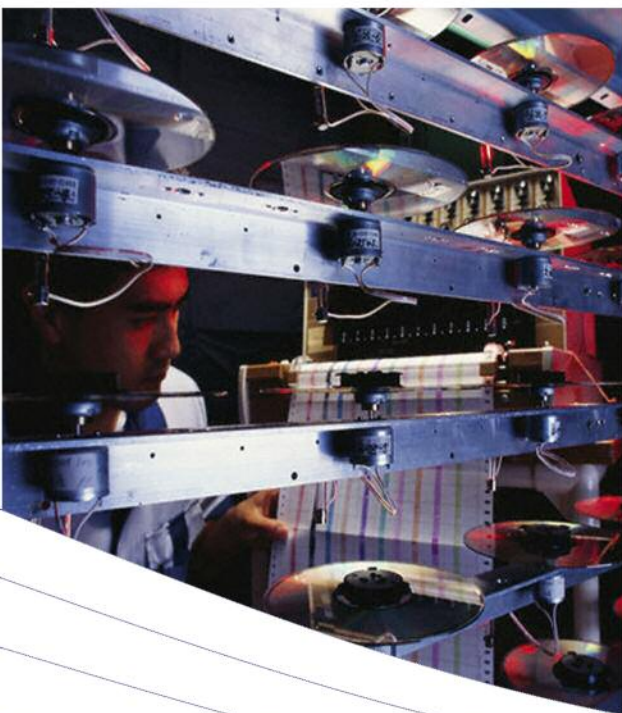
Accreditation body members of IAF are admitted to the MLA only after stringent evaluation of their operations by a peer evaluation team. It is the responsibility of this team to assess that the applicant member complies fully with both the relevant international standards and associated IAF documents.

Each accreditation body that is a signatory to the IAF MLA 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.
- Recognise the competence and impartiality of accreditations of conformity assessment bodies by all other signatories of the MLA.

The IAF MLA has been structured to build on existing and developing regional MLAs established around the world. IAF has granted special recognition to the MLA programs of five Regional Accreditation Groups, the African Accreditation Cooperation (AFRAC), the Asia Pacific Accreditation Cooperation (APAC), the Arab Accreditation Cooperation (ARAC), the European cooperation for Accreditation (EA), and the Inter American Accreditation Cooperation (IAAC), on the basis of the acceptance of the multilateral recognition arrangements established within these regions.

IAF members who are also signatories of these regional MLAs are readily accepted into the IAF MLA for the corresponding scope. The IAF MLA for Quality Management Systems (QMS) has been operational since 22 January 1998 when 14 IAF Members signed the Arrangement in Guangzhou, China. The IAF MLAs for Environmental Management Systems (EMS) and Product Certification became operational at the IAF Annual Meetings held in Cape Town, South Africa in October 2004. In 2010, the three MLAs were combined into one MLA with scopes.





Today, the IAF MLA is structured at five levels:

**Level 1** – ISO/IEC 17011, specifies the criteria for accreditation bodies (ABs)

**Level 2** – Accreditation activities, in which the AB has demonstrated competence to perform accreditation as specified by the IAF endorsed generic accreditation normative documents listed in Level 3. IAF MLA accreditation activities are:

- Management system certification
- Product certification
- Certification of persons
- Verification and Validation

**Level 3** – IAF endorsed generic accreditation normative documents used by the AB to assess the conformity assessment body (CAB) competence for each accreditation activity. For example:

- For management system certification –ISO/IEC 17021-1
- For product certification – ISO/IEC 17065
- For certification of persons – ISO/IEC 17024
- For Greenhouse Gas Verification and Validation-ISO 14065

**Level 4** – IAF endorsed sector specific normative documents which specify internationally recognized applications of the generic normative documents listed in Level 3. The documents are used by the AB, in combination with the generic normative documents listed in Level 3 to assess the CAB competence in the relevant sector. For example:

- (a) normative documents to be used in combination with ISO/IEC 17021-1:
- For certification of food safety management systems (FSMS) – ISO/TS 22003
  - For certification of information security management systems (ISMS) – ISO/IEC 27006

b) normative documents to be used in combination with) ISO/IEC 17065:

GLOBALG.A.P. Integrated Farm Assurance General Regulations

**Level 5** – IAF endorsed conformity assessment normative documents used by CABs. For example :

- a) normative documents used by Management System certification bodies
- For certification of Quality Management Systems (QMS) – ISO 9001
  - For certification of Environmental Management Systems (EMS) – ISO 14001
  - For certification of Food Safety Management Systems (FMS) – ISO 22000
  - For Information Security Management Systems (IMS) – ISO/IEC 27001
- b) normative document used by Product certification bodies:
- GLOBALG.A.P. IFA Control Points and Compliance Criteria

The combination of a Level 2 activity and the Level 3 relevant normative documents is called a main scope of the MLA. The outcomes of CABs where the MLA is at the main scope level are considered to be equally reliable.

Level 4 and Level 5 do not exist for all main scopes. Level 4 and Level 5 are called sub-scopes of the MLA. The outcomes of conformity assessment bodies are considered to be equivalent.

IAF encourages its accreditation body members to become signatories to the MLA, however before they can become a signatory they have to pass a rigorous peer evaluation process, to ensure that their accreditation programs are of world standard. The benefit of becoming a signatory to the IAF MLA is that certification bodies accredited by the signatories to the MLA will be equally reliable in world wide IAF programs.

# IAF MLA Mark



All IAF MLA signatories are able to enter into a licensing agreement with IAF to use the IAF MLA Mark in combination with their own accreditation body symbol (otherwise known as a Combined MLA Mark).

Once licensed, IAF MLA signatories can enter into a sub-licensing agreement with their accredited certification bodies to also use the IAF MLA Mark in combination with the accreditation symbol. Accredited conformity assessment bodies are thus entitled to use the combined mark on their certificates in association with an IAF MLA sub-scope.

Accreditation bodies who are using the IAF MLA 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 conformity assessment bodies. The accredited certification bodies, who have been sub-licensed and use the combined MLA Mark on their certificates, are in turn able to receive the benefits of promoting their accreditation as being internationally recognised.



## Maintaining the integrity of the MLA

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

- 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 MLA must also designate a liaison officer to ensure a consistent and effective channel of communication amongst the accreditation bodies.



## Summary

Accreditations granted by IAF Multilateral Recognition Arrangement (MLA) accreditation body signatories are recognised worldwide based on their equivalent accreditation programs, therefore reducing costs and adding value to industry and consumers.

The IAF MLA promotes trust and builds confidence among accreditation bodies through their ability to determine the competence of certification bodies, which in turn facilitates the acceptance of certificates between economies.

The MLA contributes to the freedom of world trade by eliminating technical barriers. Assessment every time a product enters a new market is expensive and time consuming. IAF works to find the most effective way of achieving a single system to achieve the objective:

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## More information about IAF and accreditation

The International Accreditation Forum (IAF) is a global association of accreditation bodies, certification body associations and other organisations involved in conformity assessment activities in a variety of fields including management systems, products and personnel.

IAF Members work together on a worldwide basis to achieve common trade facilitation objectives by developing the principles and practices for the conduct of conformity assessment that will deliver the confidence needed for market acceptance.

IAF promotes the worldwide acceptance of certificates of conformity issued by certification bodies accredited by IAF MLA signatories and seeks to add value for all stakeholders through its activities and programs.

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