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Monday 26th March 2018

Committee Secretary

Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Via email to: fadt.sen@aph.gov.au

RE: Submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Inquiry into the UN Sustainable Development Goals

Dear Secretary,

As the nation's National Standards Body, Standards Australia welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to this Inquiry. The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a structured global framework to address many of the complex and multi-faceted challenges facing our world. The Australian Government has made a commitment to realising these goals, both through domestic implementation and regional and international partnerships, including through aid-for-trade initiatives.

As Australia's member of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC), we are of the view that International Standards already play a pivotal role in many areas of public life, with an even greater potential to support the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in a systematic way. To function in this manner, the implementation of consensus based technical solutions, underpinned by International and Australian Standards, should continue to proceed and be documented and supported by detailed studies. This will provide a solid evidence base from which to prioritise and support the development of an ongoing robust monitoring and evaluation framework for the SDGs, ensuring a focus on driving outcomes and ensuring accountability.

Standards Australia is currently represented on the ISO Technical Management Board (TMB) Taskforce on the Sustainable Development Goals, assisting in driving the ISO's response to a range of global challenges of relevance to regions, cities, towns and communities. For the duration of this Taskforce, we will be providing expert advice on the alignment of International Standards with the SDGs, as well as identifying the potential to build on existing and new partnerships to foster and facilitate the development, adoption and use of International Standards to help realise the SDGs.

Standards and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): A strong connection

International and national public policy commitments are critical, but it is their implementation and monitoring/evaluation, for the purposes of accountability, that matters most. Standards based solutions provide a key mechanism, at governance, management and technical levels, to implement public policy goals. The same applies in relation to international commitments, such as the SDGs. The SDG's, articulated in a range of thematic areas, entail a set of specific commitments of relevance domestically, regionally and internationally. They comprise of 17 universal goals, 169 targets, and 232 indicators leading up to 2030.¹ These straddle tensions between poverty alleviation and development, sustainability and growth, and the safety and availability of goods. They speak to real, and pressing challenges globally, ranging from water availability and use, to ageing populations, changing health needs and attendant pressure on the government finances in the mid-long term.² This is a situation replicated in Australia at Federal and State levels,³ as well as within the Indo-Pacific region.⁴

Accordingly, it is important that Australia considers how to best respond to, and embed, a commitment to the realisation of the SDGs at different scales (in domestic, regional and international settings). This will deliver not only a diplomatic, social and environmental dividends, but an economic one too, particularly where the adoption of more efficient, standardised products opens new trade routes for Australian companies and exporters providing goods and services.

There are already a range of standards that arguably contribute to the realisation of the SDGs in the Australian context, and indeed globally, that Standards Australia have either facilitated the development of directly, or been involved in. These are outlined in detail in Attachment 1 and are mapped against the most relevant SDGs.

Measuring the impact: A framework for action

Implementing Australian or International Standards, as a vehicle for realising the SDGs, necessitates a framework for ongoing monitoring and evaluation. This is to ensure that there is: (1) the desired impact for recipients or beneficiaries of an area of standardisation (including internationally through aid-for-trade programs), and (2) value for taxpayers (politically, socially, and/or economically) in investments made by the Government. This is admittedly challenging, with the difficulties in specifying points of intervention that take into account: space, time, level and causal strength of different factors, as well as the challenge of overcoming the proximal/distal divide in measuring health and social outcomes, for example.⁵ Below, in figure one, we have depicted a macro-level framework for Standards, as a mechanism to implement the SDGs, when informing and underpinning specific investments and initiatives.

Figure one: Macro-level framework for Standards as a mechanism to implement the SDGs

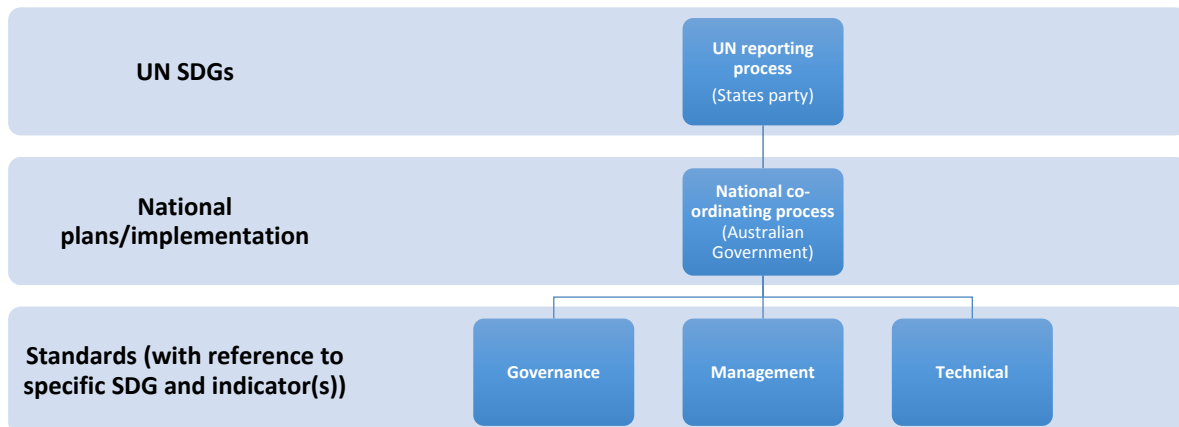
¹ United Nations (2018). 'Global indicator framework for the Sustainable Development Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', accessed 05/03/2018 from: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/indicators-list/>

² WHO Commission on the Social Determinants of Health (2008). *Closing the Gap in a Generation: Health equity through action on the social determinants of health*. Geneva: World Health Organization.

³ The Treasury (2015). *Intergenerational Report*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia. See also: NSW Treasury (2016). *The Intergenerational Report: Future State NSW in 2056*. Sydney: NSW Government.

⁴ Standards Australia (2016). *The Role of Standards and Innovation for Driving APEC's Silver Economy*. Singapore: APEC Secretariat.

⁵ Krieger, N. (2008). Proximal, Distal, and the Politics of Causation: What's Level Got to Do With It? *American Journal of Public Health*, 98(2): 221–230.



At a more granular level, the respective SDG indicators provide a natural point for alignment between desired outcomes and standards, as depicted below in relation to SDG 4 and International Standards in the building and construction sector. This is the level, we argue, where the value of standards can be clearly understood, moving from a broad aspiration to specific implementation.

Figure two: Standards and the SDGs - A snapshot of how alignment with indicators can enable implementation



Recommendations

We suggest that the Committee recommend that:

1. The Australian Government acknowledges the important role Australian and International Standards play in ensuring the realisation of the SDGs – particularly given their universal applicability.
2. The Australian Government, through DFAT, commission a value chain scoping study to establish and examine how the development and adoption of Standards does and can make an even greater meaningful and measurable impact in the implementation of the SDGs.
3. The Australian Government, through relevant contractual or other reporting practices, take proactive steps to collect and report on data, disaggregated by relevant indicators, in the context of aid-for-trade projects that relate to the realisation of SDG goals.

Dr Bronwyn Evans,
Chief Executive Officer