

Second Submission to the Productivity Commission's Study into Standard-Setting

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I would like to take this opportunity to update my initial Submission (No 116 of around 120), in light also of the Commission's draft Research Report released in July and around 60 more Submissions following that. Although your draft Report tactfully suggested that the processes and structures developed by Standards Australia (SA) are generally sound, your own draft Recommendations and dozens of Submissions confirm my growing impression that SA has serious problems. In particular, it is characterised by increasingly imbalanced (especially big business oriented) stakeholder participation on Committees, delays, and general disorganisation.

As explained in my initial Submission, I am a self-funded retiree whose career has been primarily in the construction industry and property development. One of my inventions has clear and wide-ranging social benefits. It also uncovered particular problems in one of SA's Standards dating back to 2000, and more general problems with some others. Accordingly I began dealing quite extensively with SA in 2002, and in 2006 I joined one of its Technical Committees to revise the particularly problematic Standard, representing the Australian Consumers Association (ACA).

Regrettably, I decided to resign from the Committee on 26 July this year. In addition to the problems described in general terms in my previous Submission, I was disappointed firstly with errors remaining even in a so-called "Amended Standard" approved in early 2006 - deleting some misleading wording, in what SA described as a first stage review of the 2000 Standard. Specifically, when I purchased (at my own expense) this Amended Standard I found it still listed 12 bodies as being represented on the Committee, whereas in fact those bodies had been represented on the 2000 Committee - only six bodies had actually been represented in the revised Committee that drafted the Amended Standard. (In addition, big business interests were now predominant in the latter, comprising five of the six bodies represented.) Although I immediately pointed out to SA this error in the published Amended Standard, I was told recently that they were still looking into the matter.

Secondly, I became very disappointed in the way a further revised Committee has been conducting a more substantive review aimed at a "Revised Standard",

addressing the associated fundamental problems of product safety, vandalism and trade measurements. Although strenuous efforts have ensured stakeholder representation was broadened for this second-stage review, including for example myself on behalf of the ACA. I felt I was not getting a fair hearing and that views expressed were not being accurately and fully minuted. I also became increasingly frustrated with the slow pace of meetings.

In these circumstances, I felt compelled to resign from SA's Committee and to turn to other avenues likely to achieve more prompt and significant improvements. Local and overseas newspapers, for example, have since published articles on my technological improvements and their various public benefits.

It is sad that the formal standard-setting process in Australia has so many problems that people are forced to turn to other means of getting a proper hearing and getting more balanced outcomes. I hope the Commission's final Report will take heed of such concerns, and give stronger recommendations for improvements to SA and the Government's involvement in standard-setting.