

GEC Selection of Product Categories

This document outlines the process followed by the Global Electronics Council (GEC) to identify new product categories for which criteria may be developed.

GEC reviews *GEC Selection of Product Categories (P75)* on an annual basis to determine if revisions are required.

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Please direct any questions on this document to CRITERIA@GEC.org.

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1.0 Introduction

The Global Electronics Council® (GEC) is a mission driven non-profit working to create a more sustainable and just world. GEC owns and operates EPEAT, a comprehensive voluntary sustainability Type 1 ecolabel that helps purchasers identify more sustainable technology products and services. EPEAT Criteria address environmental and social impacts across the entire product lifecycle, from extraction of resources and manufacturing, through to assembly, use, and end of life. GEC develops criteria using a balanced, voluntary consensus process that aligns with and draws from the characteristics of voluntary consensus defined in:

- ISO 14024 *Environmental labels and declarations – Type 1 environmental labelling – Principles and procedures*¹, and
- U.S. Executive Office of the President, Office of Management and Budget, OMB Circular A-119: *Federal Participation in the Development and Use of Voluntary Consensus Standards and in Conformity Assessment Activities*².

All GEC Criteria are publicly available free of charge, and products that meet EPEAT Criteria are identified in the public facing website called the EPEAT Registry. Before becoming EPEAT-registered, an independent GEC-approved Conformity Assurance Body must confirm the product's conformance with EPEAT Criteria.

Prior to developing criteria for a new product category, GEC completes a Business Case (for internal use) and releases a summary of its findings and recommendations, referred to as a Product Category Proposal, for public comment. As a Type 1 ecolabel operating in accordance with the principles and requirements of ISO 14024 *Environmental labels and declarations – Type 1 environmental labelling – Principles and procedures*, GEC ensures that the process which guides its selection of product categories is transparent, and that interested stakeholders are appropriately engaged and consulted.

This document [*GEC Selection of Product Categories (P75)*] describes the process GEC follows to evaluate and determine whether to pursue the development of criteria for a new product category. If GEC decides to pursue the development of criteria for a new product category, GEC subsequently launches its criteria development process. A companion document, *GEC Criteria Development Process (P74)*, outlines GEC's criteria development and revision procedures.

¹ Available at: <https://www.iso.org>

² Available at: https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/revised_circular_a-119_as_of_1_22.pdf

2.0 Identification of Potential Product Categories

GEC is solely responsible for determining which new product categories will be evaluated and for initiating the process to select product categories. GEC independently monitors industry, market, and policy trends to identify potential product categories. Before initiating an evaluation of a new product category, GEC considers internal resources to evaluate and implement a new product category, whether the proposed product category aligns with GEC's organizational mission, and the activities of other organizations.

GEC also considers written requests from stakeholders, including manufacturers, purchasers, and policymakers regarding potential product categories on an ongoing basis; however, GEC is not required to initiate the product category selection process in response to a stakeholder request. GEC acknowledges receipt of all written stakeholder requests within 14 days. If GEC progresses with the product category selection process, GEC informs the stakeholder of the availability of the Product Category Proposal and the opportunity to provide feedback through the public consultation process, as summarized in Section 5.0. Since initiation and decisions regarding potential product categories are carefully evaluated, there may be a considerable time lapse before a decision is reached. Further, GEC may choose not to pursue a new product category at all, in which case the stakeholder will also be informed.

3.0 Business Case

3.1 Overview

Developing a Business Case is the first step in GEC's process of selecting new product categories for which criteria may be developed. The Business Case identifies the landscape of relevant technology providers and manufacturers, large-scale purchaser demand, and whether there are opportunities for this product category to reduce sustainability impacts. Stakeholder insights on a new product category is an important component of the Business Case, and to this end, GEC may conduct targeted outreach to gather stakeholder views in the development of the Business Case.

The Business Case may be developed by GEC or by a third-party on behalf of GEC, and addresses at a minimum, the following topics: market research and policy drivers, sustainability impacts related to the manufacture, use and disposal of the product, stakeholder interest, purchaser demand, and GEC capacity. The Business Case provides a data driven analysis and makes an overall recommendation regarding whether GEC developing criteria for the product category would be successful and impactful in reducing sustainability impacts.

If the outcome of the Business Case is a recommendation to develop criteria for a new product category, GEC prepares a Product Category Proposal for public consultation which summarizes the components of the Business Case, its findings, and the considerations leading to the recommendation that criteria be developed. GEC may choose to issue and/or combine the Product Category Proposal with its State of Sustainability Research, which is the initial step in the criteria development process as described in *GEC Criteria Development Process (P74)*.

3.2 Development of the Business Case

The Business Case compiles insights on the following factors: market research and policy drivers, sustainability impacts, stakeholder interest, and GEC capacity.

3.2.1 Market Research and Policy Drivers

The Business Case reviews and compiles key insights from existing market research studies regarding product scope, market size, key geographies, market drivers, sales and procurement trends, and leading brands and manufacturers of the identified technology or service category. Key regulatory drivers and government policies impacting the product category from a sustainability perspective are also examined.

3.2.2 Sustainability Impacts

GEC conducts a literature review to assess the availability of lifecycle data and determine whether existing research identifies sustainability impacts and opportunities for improvements in the technology and its supply chain. Research also identifies existing sustainability ecolabels or other voluntary programs and initiatives that may cover the product category.

3.2.3 Stakeholder Interest

The Business Case evaluates demand for products and services in the category by large-scale institutional purchasers in the private and public sectors and the ability of technology providers and manufacturers to address sustainability impacts for the product category. GEC also gathers viewpoints from a variety of interested stakeholders, including but not limited to policy makers, environmental non-government organizations, manufacturers, and suppliers. GEC may review existing literature to gain insights into stakeholder perspectives or conduct targeted stakeholder outreach to gain insights into purchaser demand for more sustainable products in the product category, and/or whether advocacy groups are interested in issues affecting the product category.

3.2.4 GEC Capacity

GEC evaluates its own technical expertise and current capacity to develop and implement criteria for the product category, in addition to both the short-term and long-term financial viability of the category.

3.3 Recommendation

The Business Case is structured to provide clear recommendations regarding whether to pursue development of criteria for a new product category. It details the opportunities and risks for each of the factors discussed in Section 3.2 and provides an overall recommendation regarding whether to proceed with criteria development for the new product category. Based on the recommendation, GEC determines whether to continue moving forward in the product category selection process. GEC is solely responsible for making this decision and may determine not to pursue the new product category.

4.0 Consultation

4.1 Product Category Proposal

If GEC decides to move forward with the product category selection process, GEC prepares a Product Category Proposal summarizing the rationale for the decision, key findings of the Business Case, and other considerations. GEC may withhold confidential business information as well as any strategic or competitive analysis pertaining to the planning and positioning of the product category. If confidential business information is omitted from the Product Category Proposal, a statement is included regarding the nature of the information withheld.

GEC may choose to issue and/or combine the Product Category Proposal with its State of Sustainability Research, which is the initial step in the criteria development process as described in *GEC Criteria Development Process (P74)*.

4.2 Stakeholder Feedback

GEC publishes the Product Category Proposal and solicits feedback from interested stakeholders during a 30-day public consultation period. GEC notifies stakeholders of the launch of the stakeholder comment period using mechanisms such as email, GEC newsletters, and public announcements on its website. Stakeholder feedback is accepted on any aspect of the Product Category Proposal and GEC's decision. If GEC issues a combined Product Category Proposal and State of Sustainability Research, the public consultation period is 60-days, in alignment with the *GEC Criteria Development Process (P74)*.

GEC considers all comments and may modify the Product Category Proposal to reflect new information submitted during the stakeholder comment period. A stakeholder comment report is prepared which summarizes all comments received, GEC's response to comments, and any action taken by GEC to modify the Product Category Proposal, if any. GEC shares the Product Category Proposal and stakeholder comment report with the Advisory Council for their feedback.

5.0 Decision

The findings of the Business Case in conjunction with stakeholder and Advisory Council feedback on the Product Category Proposal serve as the basis from which GEC makes its final decision regarding whether to develop criteria for a new product category.

GEC is solely responsible for making the final decision regarding whether to develop criteria for a new product category. Upon making a final decision, GEC announces its decision and makes available on the GEC website the final Product Category Proposal and the stakeholder comment report. Stakeholders are notified of the final decision by email, GEC newsletters, and public announcements on the EPEAT website.

6.0 Complaints and Appeals

GEC operates a complaints and appeals process to allow stakeholder concerns about the selection of product categories to be addressed fairly. GEC has a documented process to receive, evaluate, and make decisions on complaints and appeals regarding GEC's decision to pursue criteria development for a new product category.

- Complaints may be raised, in writing, by any party and may address any aspect of GEC's product category selection process.
- Any party may appeal, in writing, any procedural matter in the implementation of GEC's product category selection process. Technical appeals regarding GEC's final decision on pursuing criteria development for a new product category are not permitted.

Complaints and appeals must be made in writing to GEC within 30 calendar days of the decision or action prompting the complaint or appeal, and must include the following information to be considered complete:

1. The reason for the complaint/appeal;
2. If the appeal is a procedural appeal regarding GEC's selection of product categories process, identification of the relevant clause(s) of this document, *GEC Selection of Product Categories (75)* against which the appeal is based;
3. Evidence substantiating the basis for the complaint/appeal;
4. The specific damage(s) or disadvantage(s) caused by the decision or action; and
5. The specific resolution requested.

Within five business days of receipt of a complaint or appeal, GEC evaluates the complaint or appeal for completeness and notifies the complainant/appellant of the outcome of the evaluation. If determined to be complete, GEC assigns a Complaint/Appeal Manager, conducts an investigation, and convenes a Complaints/Appeals Committee. The complainant or appellant is informed of the name and title of the individuals serving on the Committee, which is comprised of at least three individuals. During the investigation, the complainant/appellant may be asked to respond to questions or provide additional information.

The Complaints/Appeals Committee reviews the complaint/appeal, all submitted documentation, and results of the investigation and makes a final decision on the complaint/appeal. The Complaint/Appeal Manager may also serve as a member of the Committee.

Complaints and appeals are handled swiftly and as transparently as possible, while still respecting the confidentiality of all parties involved. Any GEC personnel specifically cited in the complaint or appeal are not involved in the investigation of that complaint or appeal and are not permitted to serve on the Complaints/Appeals Committee. GEC ensures that complaints and appeals do not result in discriminatory actions. No complainant, appellant, or other individual shall be negatively treated for

bringing forward a complaint or appeal, providing information related to a complaint or appeal, or helping to resolve a complaint or appeal.

GEC notifies the complainant/appellant in writing of its decision on the complaint/appeal within 60 business days of the issuing the decision on completeness. GEC retains full authority to make the final determination in the case of all complaints and appeals pertaining to GEC's selection of product categories.

All GEC activities continue without limitation during an investigation into a complaint or appeal.

7.0 Revisions and Effective Date

GEC reviews *GEC Selection of Product Categories (P75)* on an annual basis to determine if revisions are required. Revisions to this document are generally published on February 15 and take effect on July 1 of any given year; however, GEC may, at its sole discretion, identify specific revisions which take effect on another date before or after July 1.

GEC considers programmatic needs when determining the effective date for all revisions and is committed to ensuring its decision is transparent and fair for all stakeholders, including Participating Manufacturers, GEC-approved CABs, and purchasers.

8.0 Supplementary Information

8.1 References

The following documents are referenced in this document, *GEC Selection of Product Categories (P93)*, and are indispensable for its application. Undated references indicate that the latest edition of the referenced document applies.

- ISO 14024 *Environmental labels and declarations – Type 1 environmental labelling – Principles and procedures*
- U.S. Executive Office of the President, Office of Management and Budget, OMB Circular A-119: *Federal Participation in the Development and Use of Voluntary Consensus Standards and in Conformity Assessment Activities*

8.2 Definitions

The following definitions are referenced throughout this document, *GEC Selection of Product Categories (P75)*, and are indispensable for its application.

Appeal: For the purposes of this document, *GEC Selection of Product Categories (P75)*, a written request for reconsideration of a procedural decision in the selection of product categories that is considered by the appellant to be inconsistent with the policies and procedures in this document. Based on definition of appeal in ISO/IEC 17000 *Conformity assessment – Vocabulary and general principles*.

Business Case: Document prepared as part of the product category selection process, which includes market research regarding the landscape of relevant technology providers; large-scale purchaser demand and stakeholder insights; sustainability impacts and where criteria have the potential to reduce these impacts; and GEC capacity. The Business Case provides a data driven analysis and makes an overall recommendation regarding whether GEC developing criteria for the product category would be successful and impactful.

Complaint: For the purposes of this document, *GEC Selection of Product Categories (P75)*, a written expression of dissatisfaction, that is not a procedural appeal, related to GEC’s selection of product categories. Based on definition of complaint in ISO/IEC 17000 *Conformity assessment – Vocabulary and general principles*.

Criteria Development Process: The process used by GEC to develop its criteria consistent with the characteristics of voluntary consensus and the requirements of ISO 14024 *Environmental label and declarations – Type 1 environmental labelling – Principles and procedures*.

GEC Criteria: Environmental and social requirements intended to reduce the sustainability impacts of a technology or service, developed through a balanced, voluntary consensus process, and adopted by GEC for application in its ecolabel(s).

Proposal for Product Category Proposal: Document prepared as part of the product category selection process, which summarizes key findings of the Business Case, the rationale for GEC’s decision to move forward with the product category selection process, and other considerations, and is released for feedback during a public comment period.

State of Sustainability Research: The presentation and analysis of available data on the life cycle sustainability impacts of a technology or service that guides the development of GEC Criteria.

Voluntary Consensus Process: The process used to develop GEC Criteria that aligns with and draws from similar principles for the characteristics of voluntary consensus as defined in ISO 14024 *Environmental labels and declarations – Type 1 environmental labelling – Principles and procedures* and in the US Government’s Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Circular A-119: *Federal Participation in the Development and Use of Voluntary Consensus Standards and in Conformity Assessment Activities*.

8.3 Document Change History

This document, *GEC Selection of Product Categories (P75)*, defines the process that GEC follows to select new product categories to develop criteria for. While not necessarily solely dedicated to the EPEAT Program, this document, *GEC Selection of Product Categories (P75)*, is controlled as part of the EPEAT Quality Management System.

Issue	Revision	Author	Description of Change	Approver	Approval Date	Effective Date
1	0	Senior Manager, Ecolabels and Resources	Initial release	VP, Criteria and Category Development	2023 Feb 15	2023 Feb 15

Issue	Revision	Author	Description of Change	Approver	Approval Date	Effective Date
1	1	Director, Ecolabels and Resources	Addition: GEC may issue the Product Category Proposal and State of Sustainability Research at the same time (3.1, 4.1, 4.2); Definition for State of Sustainability Research (8.2).	VP, Criteria and Category Development	2024 Feb 15	2024 Jul 01