

AA 1000 Assurance Standard

In its own words the AA 1000 Assurance Standard is a generally applicable standard for assessing, attesting to, and strengthening the credibility and quality of organisations' sustainability reporting, and their underlying processes, systems and competencies. It provides guidance on key elements of the assurance process. Wider industry has welcomed this as an important step in improving the quality and credibility of the ever-increasing amount of corporate sustainability reporting being undertaken by companies.

In an environment where there is a lack of guidance, and clarity on the subject of independent assurance, the use of the AA1000 Assurance Standard in assurance provision to sustainability reports is increasingly being adopted as the commonly accepted guidance by corporations. AccountAbility's AA1000 Assurance Standard is the first initiative offering a non-proprietary, open-source assurance standard covering the full range of an organisation's disclosure and associated performance, ie. 'sustainability' reporting and performance. It draws from and builds on mainstream financial, environmental and quality-related assurance, and integrates key learning with the emerging practice of sustainability management and accountability, as well as associated reporting and assurance practices (AA1000, 2002).

The Standard suggests that assurance levels may depend on the extent and quality of the following:

- Information available.
- Sufficiency of evidence.
- Underlying systems and processes.
- Internal Assurance systems.
- Existing Assurance for specific aspects of performance reporting.
- Resources allocated for assurance by the reporting organisation.
- Legal or commercial constraints.
- Competencies of the assurance provider.

The following principles must be applied in an assurance process undertaken using the AA1000 Assurance Standard:

- Materiality
- Completeness
- Responsiveness

URS has recently utilised the Standard in Australia in assurance programs involving Sydney Water, Melbourne Water, NSW State Forests and Toyota Australia. In general, the Standard provides for a holistic assessment of the report and the reporting entity. Accordingly, the Assurance Statement is able to comment on the sustainability progress made by the entity, unlike Verification Statements, which simply comment on the accuracy of the statements made, and data provided within the report.

References

<http://www.ea.gov.au/index.html>

AA1000 Assurance Standard
www.accountability.org.uk

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