United Nations Global Compact: GECA's Communication on Engagement (CoE)

Period covered: 5 August 2021 – 1 September 2023

Part 1. Statement of Continued Support by the Chief Executive Officer

Dear Stakeholders and Members,

As part of our commitment to transparency and engagement, we are delighted to provide you with a detailed account of Good Environmental Choice Australia's (GECA) dedication to the United Nations (UN) Global Compact's Ten Guiding Principles, with a specific focus on the criteria embedded in our standards.

Our core service offering is our lifecycle ecolabel, following ISO 14024 principles for global best practice. In this program, we require products and services being certified to demonstrate that they are is good for the environment, healthy for people, ethically made and fit-for-purpose. We also offer training and consultancy services and have been active in supporting Australian businesses to commit to better sustainability practices, including social sustainability.

There is a very strong alignment between the UN Global Compact and GECA's goals. Our commitment is to advancing sustainable consumption and production, both locally in Australia and as an active member of the Global Ecolabelling Network (GEN). These outcomes are deeply ingrained in our organisational DNA, shaping our mission and vision. This Communication on Engagement (CoE) chronicles our actions and the tangible outcomes achieved during this reporting period, providing insight into the evolution of our initiatives from preceding periods.

In our unwavering commitment to transparency, we pledge to keep our stakeholders and members informed about our continued support to the UN Global Compact's Ten Guiding Principles, through a variety communication channels, including regular updates, insightful newsletters, comprehensive Annual Reports, and compliance with reporting requirements outlined by the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC). As well as delivering these tools, we also maintain an attitude of continuous improvement to ensure they help our partners increasingly achieve best-practice outcomes.

Warm regards,

Josh Begbie
Chief Executive Officer

Part. 2 Description of Actions

GECA has undertaken several actions in this reporting period that demonstrate our commitment to the UN Global Compact and its Ten Principles. We have continued to help grow several signatories to the UN Global Compact again in this reporting period, and we have certified several products and services that are audited against our standards. Our work and standards align closely with the UN Global Compact's Ten Principles, spanning human rights, labour, environment, and anti-corruption. Here's a breakdown of how GECA's initiatives contribute to each principle:

Principle 1: Businesses should support and respect the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights.

- GECA Contribution: GECA's standards go beyond legal compliance, explicitly requiring businesses to support and respect human rights. This includes detailed criteria on social and legal compliance, modern slavery, fair pay, workplace health and safety, equal opportunity, and lawful conduct. The certification process involves a comprehensive assessment of a company's commitment to upholding human rights.

Principle 2: Businesses should make sure that they are not complicit in human rights abuses.

- GECA Contribution: GECA's certification process includes thorough audits to ensure that businesses seeking certification are not complicit in any human rights abuses. This includes assessments of supply chains, production processes, and overall corporate conduct.

Principle 3: Businesses should uphold the freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining.

- GECA Contribution: GECA standards explicitly support the freedom of association and collective bargaining. By aligning with these principles, GECA-certified businesses demonstrate a commitment to fair labour practices, fostering positive relationships with their workforce.

Principle 4: The elimination of all forms of forced and compulsory labour.

- GECA Contribution: GECA's stringent criteria against forced and compulsory labour ensure that businesses seeking certification are free from such practices. This includes assessments of recruitment processes, working conditions, and supply chain management.

Principle 5: The effective abolition of child labour.

- GECA Contribution: GECA's standards include explicit prohibitions on child labour. Through thorough assessments, GECA ensures that certified businesses contribute to the effective abolition of child labour in their operations and supply chains.

Principle 6: The elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation.

- GECA Contribution: GECA promotes equal opportunity and non-discrimination through its standards. Certified businesses are required to implement policies and practices that eliminate discrimination in all aspects of employment, fostering diverse and inclusive workplaces.

Principle 7: Businesses should support a precautionary approach to environmental challenges.

- GECA Contribution: GECA's commitment to material and product life cycle analysis, including industrial chemistry, reflects a precautionary approach to environmental challenges. By assessing environmental impacts at every stage, GECA-certified products minimise potential harm.

Principle 8: Businesses should undertake initiatives to promote greater environmental responsibility.

- GECA Contribution: GECA-certified businesses actively undertake initiatives to promote greater environmental responsibility. This includes adopting sustainable practices, reducing resource consumption, and implementing measures to minimise environmental impacts throughout the product life cycle.

Principle 9: Businesses should encourage the development and diffusion of environmentally friendly technologies.

- GECA Contribution: GECA's standards, aligning with ISO 14024, contribute to the development and diffusion of environmentally friendly technologies and product development. By setting high benchmarks for eco-friendly products, GECA encourages innovation in sustainable technologies.

Principle 10: Businesses should work against corruption in all its forms, including extortion and bribery.

- GECA Contribution: GECA actively promotes a culture of integrity through its standards. Certified businesses adhere to legal and ethical standards, fostering an environment resistant to corruption. The certification process includes evaluations of business conduct, transparency, and anti-corruption measures.

GECA has also been actively engaged in diverse and impactful projects alongside various stakeholders. Our commitment to providing consultancy and advisory services has led us to collaborate with leading retailers in the office and furniture sector, while also partnering with organisations dedicated to advancing sustainability initiatives.

One noteworthy project during this reporting period involved GECA undertaking a comprehensive review and enhancement of a prominent Australian retailer's sustainability program. Working closely with the retailer's sustainability team, we identified two key themes—transparency and credibility—which became the focal points of transformative recommendations. These recommendations encompassed adopting a holistic sustainability approach, repositioning the program as an educational campaign, and implementing rigorous verification processes. Our ultimate goal was to enhance the program's effectiveness, credibility, and educational impact.

Additionally, GECA played a pivotal role in consolidating information from five retailers, twice over two years, regarding their actions on modern slavery within their operations and supply chains, as mandated by the Australian Modern Slavery Act 2018. Collaborating closely with these retailers, we formulated a comprehensive statement that was successfully submitted to the Australian Government as compliant with the Act.

GECA has proudly been a Certified B Corp since November 2015. B Corp certified businesses are third-party verified that meet the highest standards of verified social and environmental performance, public transparency, and legal accountability to balance profit and purpose. GECA has received recognition each time for being one of the best in the world in Governance with a top score in overall mission, ethics, accountability, and transparency.

In essence, GECA's commitment to the UN Global Compact's Ten Principles is evident in the thoroughness of its standards and certification processes. GECA ensures that businesses operating under its certification contribute positively to human rights, labour practices, environmental sustainability, and anti-corruption efforts. The organisation plays a vital role in promoting responsible and ethical business practices in Australia and beyond.

Part 3. Measurement of Outcomes

We have onboarded over 10 new businesses who have certified over 50 products, adhering to the criteria outlined above. We assisted seven companies, and then the same five the following year, with their modern slavery work under the Australian Modern Slavery Act 2018.