



## NZ ENVIRONMENTAL AGENCY SHOWS THE WORLD

A global study commissioned by the British Government has named New Zealand's official ecolabelling agency as a world leader.

The UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has mapped and analysed worldwide standards and methods used for measuring environmental sustainability of products. The report was prepared by British-based international consultancy Environmental Resources Management Ltd. It aims to evaluate and present to the British Government the world's best practice organisations in the certification of sustainability, as an aid to government procurement policy.

Considering 207 standards, databases and product lists globally, the research looked at the robustness of standards used for measuring sustainability, the range of criteria applied, and the methodology used. Those agencies with standards considered "ambitious" enough to warrant possible adoption by the UK were grouped as "Class 1".

The study scored organisations for open and thorough consultation in developing standards, the frequency of updating them, backing by government, the strength of evidence collected for assessments, and the use of whole-of-lifecycle considerations.

Two of the world's best-known and most comprehensive ecolabels, the Nordic Swan and Germany's Blue Angel, were chosen along with the EU Flower as "Class 1" candidates. Fairtrade and Energy Star were other agencies selected as world leaders in the areas of food and office IT equipment. When it came to the selection of a world-class authority using furniture as a representative standard, the example chosen was Environmental Choice New Zealand.

The report states:

*Of the nineteen standards assessed, eleven represent national labelling and certification schemes for furniture and fittings, seven of the labels are European in origin - and four represent international or European-wide schemes. The most significant are the FSC, Nordic Swan and Environmental Choice New Zealand, which serve as international best practice standards to which national labelling schemes should be referred.*

The UK report also stated:

*Initiated and endorsed by the New Zealand Government, Environmental Choice provides a credible and independent guide across a range of different product types, for consumers who want to purchase products with reduced environment impacts.*

In New Zealand, Environmental Choice certification for furniture and fittings has been gained by Laminex, Nelson Pine and Southern Pine products, and other leading manufacturers are also engaged in the process. The study stated:

*The criteria are considered to represent best practice globally in terms of the environmental performance of furniture, and its adoption would bring numerous environmental benefits as well as human health benefits to producers and consumers of furniture products. The standard takes a comprehensive view of the environmental issues posed by the manufacture of furniture and makes a credible attempt to address each of them in a way that few other global standards currently do.*

When it came to locating a leading agency using paper manufacturing as a representative standard, New Zealand's Environmental Choice was again named in the trio of the world's best.

General manager of the label, Robin Taylor, says the ranking of our ecolabelling agency as one of the world's best practice certifiers of sustainability is of such significance that it uplifts our country's environmental reputation. "This puts Environmental Choice on the map with organisations that are legendary for their commitment, their standards and depth of authority, and whose breadth of environmental certification shows the way forward.

"One of the criteria for belonging to this exclusive listing was that our standard should 'go beyond existing EU requirements'. It's very encouraging that New Zealand's official ecolabel outperforms international benchmarks. The Ministry for the Environment, which owns the label, has much to be proud of in Environmental Choice and the independent trust set up to administer it."

Methodology that did not display the same robustness as that found in Environmental Choice would have disqualified some self-claimed labelling agencies. This, says Robin Taylor, is an issue internationally, where market-driven private enterprise companies sometimes try to offer much less thoroughly substantiated "certifications".

"It is not sufficient to just put ticks in boxes and hold that up as some kind of environmental proof. Without mechanisms such as Global Ecolabelling Network peer review, third-party verified published standards, open industry consultation, and ultimately committed and innovative producers, the 'box tick' mentality has little chance of any really valid certification of sustainability that could be recognised internationally.

"Independently run by the NZ Ecolabelling Trust, the Environmental Choice process has been proven by this UK study to be tough, true, and transparent. It is gratifying to know we have been selected among the world's best."

NOTE: A record number of companies (25) is presently registered and undergoing the assessment process for certification by Environmental Choice New Zealand.

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For more information contact: Michael Hooper, Communications Advisor,  
Environmental Choice New Zealand. [spotlightmedia@clear.net.nz](mailto:spotlightmedia@clear.net.nz) . (021) 940 893. DDI  
(09) 403 7675. [www.environmentalchoice.org.nz](http://www.environmentalchoice.org.nz).