



Goals and Principles for the Nordic Ecolabel (the Swan)

The *Goals and Principles for the Nordic Ecolabel* were adopted by the Nordic Council of Ministers for the Environment on 22/10/2014.

The Nordic Council of Ministers made the decision to establish an official Nordic Ecolabel on 6 November 1989. All of the Nordic countries have adopted the Nordic Ecolabel.

§ 1 Purpose

The Nordic Ecolabel was set up as an official label for the countries in the Region. The purpose is to establish a voluntary Nordic labelling system that helps reduce the environmental impact of consumption.

§ 2 Objectives

The Nordic Ecolabel helps consumers, companies and other organisations to purchase in an environmentally conscious manner. It also encourages the development of products and services that have less of an impact on the environment and climate than similar products on the market.

The Nordic Ecolabel takes into account the environmental impact of goods and services during their entire life cycle, from raw materials to waste products. It places strict requirements on climate and environmental impact, and also function and quality.

The label serves as a consumer-policy tool for the environment and complements other environment-policy instruments.

It is an important instrument for achieving the Nordic countries' goals for sustainable consumption and production, as outlined in the Nordic Environmental Action Plan and the Nordic Sustainable Development Strategy.

§ 3 Operations and activity

The Nordic Ecolabel is regulated by the Nordic Council of Ministers, by this document and by the *Rules of Procedure for the Nordic Ecolabelling Board*. The Nordic Ecolabelling Board approves *Regulations for the Nordic Ecolabelling of Products*.

The label is used in accordance with ISO 14024 for Type 1 ecolabelling.

The Nordic Ecolabel is based on the following:

- Joint Nordic criteria set by the Nordic Ecolabelling Board for a variety of product groups
- Operational co-ordination of national ecolabelling organisations by *the Nordic Ecolabelling Association*
- National management by legal entities
- Openness to all stakeholders interested in the work processes

- Licensing of the Nordic Ecolabel for products (goods and services), following application and approval
- Mutual recognition of licences issued by the other national ecolabelling organisations.

The Nordic Ecolabel achieves credibility via joint Nordic development and ~~evaluation~~ revision of the criteria for its use. These criteria stipulate low environmental and climate impact, as well as high standards of quality, and applications are evaluated by competent, independent bodies.

This work takes into account and reflects developments in environmental technology, up-to-date knowledge of environmental issues and market conditions.

§ 4 Organisation at Nordic level

All fundamental decisions about the Ecolabel – including guidelines, rules for development work and criteria for usage – are made at Nordic level. It is also important that the same principles underpin the work with the Ecolabel in all of the Nordic countries. It must be recognised by consumers and manufacturers as a joint Nordic ecolabel.

The Nordic Ecolabelling Board is the decision-making body responsible for ~~setting~~ adopting criteria and product groups for the Nordic Ecolabel. It also serves as a forum for all strategic decisions concerning the label.

The Nordic Ecolabelling Board's functions and duties are defined in greater detail in the *Rules of Procedure for the Nordic Ecolabelling Board*, adopted by the Nordic Council of Ministers.

The Nordic Ecolabelling Association is responsible for the operational co-ordination of the national ecolabelling organisations.

The heads of the national ecolabelling organisations work closely together and meet on a regular basis.

§ 5 Organisation at national level

A national ecolabelling organisation, appointed by the governments, is responsible for the Nordic Ecolabel in each of the countries.

Relevant national organisations and agencies must be offered opportunities to take part in and influence discussions about criteria on a national level.

The national ecolabelling organisations are responsible for the licensing of individual products using set criteria, in accordance with the requirement for certification stipulated by international standard ISO 17065. They are also responsible for marketing issues. The national ecolabelling organisations present joint proposals to the Nordic Ecolabelling Board regarding work on criteria.

The work of and co-operation between the national ecolabelling organisations is based on mutually recognised competences.

§ 6 Principles for criteria development

6.1 General principles

When drawing up and adopting Nordic ecolabelling criteria, the first priority is to take into consideration the environmental impact of products available on the Nordic market.

When choosing new product groups for the Nordic Ecolabel, the focus should be on potential environmental benefits, and on consumers' and purchasers' need for guidance with regard to environmentally sound products. The value of ecolabelling a specific product group is assessed in relation to, among other things, current market research, technical developments and other relevant environmental information systems.

The Nordic Ecolabelling Association is responsible for setting environmental and market-related sub-targets for each product group.

The Nordic Ecolabelling Board approves the criteria for the ecolabelling of products (goods and services). Criteria documents are drawn up describing the specific requirements for each product area.

6.2 Types of requirements

The environmental impact through the product's life-cycle is analysed and forms the basis for defining a limited number of requirements for the most important environmental issues ("hotspots"). Key factors in this work include the choice of raw materials, use of hazardous chemicals, use of energy and resources, emissions to all kind of recipients, health aspects, noise and waste treatment associated with production, transport and final disposal. The product's lifespan and whether it can be repaired are also important, as is the extent to which it can be reused and recycled. Environmental principles, such as the precautionary and substitution principles are also included in the development of criteria.

The environmental priorities are based upon the Nordic Ecolabel's RPS analysis tool (relevance, potential, steerability).

Products featuring the Nordic Ecolabel should ~~also~~ be characterised by good quality and functionality. As a result, the ecolabelling criteria usually include requirements regarding these factors.

In addition to environmental criteria, sustainability criteria are gradually being added to the Nordic Ecolabel criteria, when criteria for relevant product groups are revised or new ones developed.

6.3 Definition of "product group"

A product group is defined on the basis of areas of use. Comparative evaluations of the products in the group are conducted and form the basis for determining the criteria.

6.4 Level of requirements

The level of environmental requirements is high and will when revised become even higher as new products on the market and technical advancements are taken into account. The stringency of the requirements is related to the Nordic countries' official environmental regulations.

The purpose of the criteria is to identify the most environmentally sound products on the Nordic market. The target is that a maximum of one third of the products available in the Nordic Region meet the criteria at the point in time when the criteria are adopted.

6.5 Validity period

The criteria are valid for a maximum of five years. The requirements are evaluated at least every third year. Based on this evaluation, the validity period is extended or the criteria revised.

In exceptional cases (e.g. due to new knowledge about the impact on health or the environment), the Nordic Ecolabelling Board can decide to repeal or significantly change currently valid criteria.

6.6 Openness

As a rule, the criteria-development work is done at Nordic level by the national ecolabelling organisations. External experts can be used as required.

Stakeholders from affected industries, official agencies and other relevant parties must be provided with opportunities to participate in the criteria-development process.

All proposals for criteria remain open for consultation for 60 days, so that all stakeholders are able to submit written comments.

Information is publicly available about the criteria adopted, proposals submitted and responses received, as well as the status of the ongoing process.

§ 7 Principles for licensing

7.1 General principles

The processing of applications, inspections, licensing and disputes are the duty of national ecolabelling organisations, in accordance with *Regulations for the Nordic Ecolabelling of Products*.

7.2 The voluntary principle

Companies may opt for ecolabelling on a voluntary basis, by applying to use the label on their products. Manufacturers/importers/distributors are eligible to apply for approval of their product according to the requirements outlined in the current criteria document.

7.3 Area of validity

When a product is licensed, the ecolabel's validity is not subject to geographical limitations.

7.4 Confidentiality

All correspondence between the applicant and the ecolabelling organisation is confidential. Only the names of licensed products and licensees are made public.

All information and documents regarding the licensing process are confidential.

7.5 Licensing agreement

The validity of the licence is determined by the validity period for the criteria. The ecolabelling organisation can rescind the licence and the right to use the Nordic Ecolabel if the licensee or the product no longer meets the criteria.

§ 8 Use of the Nordic Ecolabel

The national ecolabelling organisations responsible for administering the Nordic Ecolabel all use the same logo. The Nordic Ecolabel's "Swan" logo is a registered trademark, protected nationally and internationally through the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO). The rules for use of the label are set out in *Regulations for the Nordic Ecolabelling of Products*.

§ 9 Relationship between the Nordic Ecolabel and the EU Ecolabel

Like the Nordic Ecolabel, the EU Ecolabel is an official ecolabel recognised in the Nordic countries. According to the EU regulations for ecolabelling (European Parliament and Council Regulation (EU) No 66/2010), harmonisation should be sought between the EU Ecolabel and national ecolabelling schemes.

The Nordic Ecolabel will work with the EU Ecolabel and select levels for the requirements in the criteria in relation to the criteria for the EU Ecolabel. In product groups that allow for parallel labelling, the processing of applications and fees will be synchronised as far as possible.

§ 10 The Nordic Ecolabel and green public procurement

The Nordic Ecolabel can be an important instrument in public procurement. One purpose of ecolabelling products is to encourage the use of the criteria in public procurement by, when necessary, adapting the criteria to match public-sector regulations for procurement. This makes it easier for suppliers to submit tenders in line with environmental requirements that apply across the whole Region.

§ 11 Funding

Funding for the Nordic Ecolabel mainly stems from licence and application fees from businesses. The fee system is set by the Nordic Ecolabelling Association and is uniform across all of the Nordic countries.

Funding from national governments and the Nordic Council of Ministers strengthens the ecolabelling system's independence and official status. The Nordic Council of Ministers decides on an annual basis whether to earmark money for work on the Nordic Ecolabel. Joint funding by the public sector is especially important for the development and revision of criteria, for continuously updating information to consumers to ensure a high level of recognition and credibility of the label across the Region and for facilitating co-ordination at Nordic level.

§ 12 Evaluation

Every five years, the Nordic Council of Ministers for the Environment decides whether it is necessary to conduct an evaluation of the Nordic Ecolabel's activities and work.

The Nordic Ecolabelling Board determines when an internal or external evaluation of the Nordic Ecolabel's activities and work is necessary.