MEDIA RELEASE

WHITE PAPER - ECOLABELS AND THEIR ROLE IN MITIGATING CLIMATE CHANGE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

A new White Paper published by the Global Ecolabelling Network (GEN) examines the critical role of lifecycle ecolabels in mitigating climate change.

It draws on recent data and expert opinion to highlight the importance of continuing to fight climate change, with ecolabels as a powerful tool to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The paper provides insights into the catastrophic impacts of human-induced climate change, with it being attributed to causing recent devastating heatwaves, bushfires, floods, and droughts, and mentions it will likely get worse without drastic measures.

The paper also indicates that unsustainable products significantly contribute to human induced climate change, with products associated with material production accounting for about 23 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions.

Nils Heuer, Associate Programme Officer of the UN's Environmental Programme (UNEP), states, "I think limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees will be difficult at this point but overall, I do believe ecolabels can contribute to limiting global warming". The paper argues that peak bodies such as GEN provide important stewardship for ecolabels globally amongst its members in the fight against climate change.

The current Chair of GEN, Bjorn-Erik Lönn, explains, "the main function for ecolabels is to offer the marketplace a credible environmental information about products, including services, and both in the B2C- and the B2B-markets. The lifecycle approach we base our requirements on must always include climate-related issues where relevant".

LDr Yulia Gracheva, Director of the Vitality Leaf ecolabelling program, argues that comprehensive solutions are needed to combat climate change, with ecolabels only one of many solutions. She says, however, "Nevertheless, since the share of consumer products in the economy is very large and consumer influence is growing, ecolabels can be an effective companion tool. It is also important to note that ecolabels are a tool whereby everyone can contribute to the fight against climate change simply by shopping in-store and making the right choices".

The paper demonstrates that genuine lifecycle ecolabels that employ third-party certification can play a significant global role in mitigating climate change by fostering the creation of sustainable products and services, assessed against science-based environmental criteria.

For example, many GEN member lifecycle ecolabels have standards relevant to the green building sector, covering products, materials and services that reduce the building and construction industry's significant climate footprint. For instance, Australia's only GEN member, GECA, has developed standards for cement and concrete, construction and demolition waste collection services, and steel. These are critical carbon hotspots for Australian buildings and infrastructure.

The tech industry is another sector embracing ecolabels as a tool to reduce its climate change impacts. For instance, the Korean Eco-Label has developed critical criteria for tech products, such as computer monitors, which aim to reduce emissions throughout the product's lifecycle stages of design and manufacturing.

The CEO of Swedish GEN member TCO Certified, Sören Enholm, explains, "For IT products and some other electrical equipment ecolabelling programmes have pushed for more energy efficient products and thereby lower greenhouse gas footprint for many years with good results. Now many of the IT products are very energy efficient, so it's more urgent to push for reduced energy use from a lifecycle perspective".

GEN's paper also highlights the opportunities for lifecycle ecolabels to further embrace and integrate climate-relevant criteria into their standards. According to Nils Heuer, "...ecolabels were originally more focussed on pollution and waste as core issues, so some of them might need to define additional climate-related criteria to better cover this important issue".

Sustainable public procurement has emerged as a crucial catalyst for the uptake of third-party certified lifecycle ecolabels to tackle climate change. For instance, the German Federal Government uses the Blue Angel ecolabel to provide reliable guidance for environmentally conscious purchasing for public and private stakeholders.

The paper concludes by arguing that if properly managed, procured and consumed, ecolabelling programmes can have a valuable role in limiting climate change and its worst impacts if organisations, governments, and the public recognise this and prioritise collaboration.
To read more information about the white paper, refer to this link.

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About the Global Ecolabelling Network (GEN)

Founded in 1994, GEN is the leading network of the world's most credible and robust ecolabels. We're a nonprofit organisation that sets the global benchmark for ecolabel excellence. We bring expertise, clarity and trust to sustainable procurement. We develop, expand and strengthen ecolabels as a tool for embedding sustainability into every major procurement decision - by businesses and governments.