

GLOBAL ACCREDITATION
COOPERATION INCORPORATED
LOGO

REQUIREMENTS AND PROCEDURES FOR EVALUATION OF A REGIONAL COOPERATION BODY

Issue Date: 23 October 2025

Implementation Date: 01 January 2026

Version No: 1.0

FURTHER INFORMATION

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 **Purpose:** This document sets out the requirements and procedures for the evaluation of Regional Cooperation Bodies (RCBs) seeking recognition under the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated MRA.
- 1.2 **Scope:** This document identifies requirements and procedures for the evaluation of Regional Cooperation Bodies of accreditation bodies operating a multilateral mutual recognition Arrangement. It includes requirements for the organisation, management system and procedures for evaluating Regional Cooperation Bodies' multilateral, mutual recognition Arrangement(s).

2. DEFINITIONS

- 2.1 **Accreditation Body (AB)** - an authoritative body that provides accreditation (*Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated-GOV-001: Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated Constitution*).
- 2.2 **Accreditation scheme** - rules and procedures specified in a standard or normative document included in the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated Arrangement that address the process for the accreditation of conformity assessment bodies (Level 3).
- 2.3 **Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated Arrangement (Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated MRA)** - the Multilateral Recognition Arrangement (MRA) on the operation of accreditation that is signed by Full Members (*Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated-GOV-001: Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated Constitution*).
- 2.4 **Arrangement** - The Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated Arrangement. The term can also refer to the Arrangements of recognised Regional Cooperation Bodies which pre-date the establishment of the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated Arrangement and which, as a consequence of the recognition process, will be accepted as a subset of the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated Arrangement.
- 2.5 **Arrangement Group** - All signatories to an Arrangement (In Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated: Arrangement Committee (MRAC)).
- 2.6 **Decision-Making Group** - A body that decides on the status of membership of an Arrangement (In Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated: Arrangement Committee (MRAC)).
- 2.7 **Evaluation Team Leader (TL)** - A person responsible for leading an Arrangement peer evaluation team in the evaluation of an accreditation body.
- 2.8 **Evaluation Team Member (TM)** - A person serving on an Arrangement peer evaluation team in the evaluation of an accreditation body.
- 2.9 **Full Member** - an Accreditation Body that has been accepted by Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated as a signatory of the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated Arrangement and meets the requirements and obligations for Associate Members as specified in the Bylaws.
- 2.10 **Management Committee (MC)** - A small member group responsible for the everyday management of the Arrangement process (In Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated: Arrangement Management Committee (AMC)).
- 2.11 **MC Secretariat** - Secretariat for the Management Committee (In Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated: Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated MRA Secretariat).

2.12 **MRA Signatory** - A Full Member or a Recognised Regional Cooperation Body that has signed the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated MRA and adheres to its requirements.

2.13 **Peer Evaluation** - A structured process of evaluation of a Regional Cooperation Body or accreditation body by representatives of accreditation bodies.

NOTE: In ISO/IEC 17040, the term peer assessment is used instead of peer evaluation and is defined slightly differently.

2.14 **Regional Arrangement Group** - All signatories to an Arrangement of a Regional Cooperation Body.

2.15 **Regional Cooperation Body** - a formally established regional cooperation of accreditation bodies that has met the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated requirements for Regional Cooperation Bodies as set out in the Constitution and the Bylaws. This term can also refer to a group of accreditation bodies (possibly involving other stakeholders) whose purpose is to develop and maintain an Arrangement, and is a group of different accreditation bodies representing different economies.

2.16 **Regional Evaluation Team Leader (TL-R)** - A person responsible for leading a team in the evaluation of a Regional Cooperation Body.

2.17 **Regional Evaluation Team Member (TM-R)** - A person serving on a team to evaluate a Regional Cooperation Body.

2.18 **Standard** - A standard or other normative document related to accreditation and conformity assessment bodies.

3. REQUIREMENTS FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION BODIES

3.1 Regional Cooperation Body – General

3.1.1 The Regional Cooperation Body shall define the scopes of its Arrangement.

3.1.2 The Regional Cooperation Body shall make its services concerning its Arrangement(s) accessible to all accreditation bodies whose activities fall within its declared field of operation and geographic area.

3.1.3 The Regional Cooperation Body shall confine its requirements, evaluations and decisions on accreditation bodies wishing to join its Arrangement to those outlined in the ISO/IEC 17011, applicable local legislation, other normative documents relevant to the function performed and, where appropriate, supplementary requirements and guidance of the Regional Cooperation Body harmonised with those of Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated.

3.1.4 The Regional Cooperation Body shall:

3.1.4.1 Identify the management which will have overall responsibility for each of the following:

- a) performance of Peer Evaluation of accreditation bodies as defined in this document,
- b) formulation of policy matters relating to the operation of the Regional Cooperation Body,

- c) decisions on Signatories to the Arrangement, and
- d) oversight of the implementation of its policies.

3.1.4.2 Ensure that each decision on the acceptability of an applicant to sign the Arrangement is taken by persons representing all Arrangement Signatories.

3.2 Management System

3.2.1 The Regional Cooperation Body shall establish and maintain a management system to operate an Arrangement in accordance with the relevant parts of this document and appropriate to the type, range and volume of work performed. The Regional Cooperation Body shall ensure effective implementation of the documented management system procedures and work instructions. The Regional Cooperation Body shall periodically audit and review the management system as a basis for improvement of the system.

3.2.2 The following elements of the management system shall be documented:

- Mission, policies, and objectives;
- Organisation chart and description of the organisation;
- Procedures for peer evaluation of a single accreditation body that are consistent with those specified in *Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated MRA-005 Requirements and Procedures for Evaluation of a Single Accreditation Body* and mandatory use of *Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated MRA-007 Template report for the peer evaluation of an Accreditation Body based on ISO/IEC 17011:2017*;
- Conduct of internal audits and management reviews;
- Control of documents;
- Selection, training, qualification and monitoring of Peer Evaluators;
- Records related to Peer Evaluation;
- Arrangements for ensuring confidentiality of Peer Evaluation information;
- Policies and procedures for the resolution of complaints and appeals received from accreditation bodies or other parties about the handling of Peer Evaluations and Arrangement Signatory status or any related matters;
- Policy and procedure for suspension and withdrawal, including the subsequent actions by the Regional Cooperation Body and the consequences of suspension or withdrawal; and
- Procedure for extending into new scopes of recognition, addressing development of the program, requirements for evaluation and decision making.

3.3 Documentation

3.3.1 The Regional Cooperation Body shall document, update at regular intervals, and make available (through publications, electronic media or other means) upon request:

- 3.3.1.1 Information about the Peer Evaluation and MLA/MRA recognition process;

- 3.3.1.2 Requirements, restrictions or limitations on ways the signatories of the Regional Cooperation Body's Arrangements(s) can refer to that recognition and to the accreditation body's signatory status;
- 3.3.1.3 Information on how to submit complaints and appeals;
- 3.3.1.4 Information on Arrangement Signatories describing the scope of recognition of each signatory; and
- 3.3.1.5 List of evaluation requirements.

3.3.2 The Regional Cooperation Body shall control all documents and records that relate to its Peer Evaluation functions. These documents shall be reviewed and approved for adequacy by appropriately authorised and competent personnel prior to the issuing of any documents, following initial development or any subsequent amendment or change being made. A listing of all appropriate documents with the respective issue and/or amendment status identified shall be maintained. For all documents describing the performance of any function related to the activities of Arrangement applicants and Arrangement signatories, the distribution shall be controlled to ensure that the appropriate issue is made available to Arrangement applicants and signatories and to personnel of the Regional Cooperation Body.

3.4 Confidentiality

- 3.4.1 All oral and written information received relating to evaluations, re-evaluations, appeals and complaints (except that information which is already publicly accessible) shall be treated confidentially by all parties and persons concerned. This includes information relating to applicants and/or signatories of the Arrangement Group.
- 3.4.2 Declarations of confidentiality shall be signed by all persons before being given access to confidential information, including:
 - all members and observers of the regional evaluation teams;
 - all members, observers and secretariat personnel of the MC and (where relevant) the Appeals Panels;
 - all applicants and signatories of the Arrangement Group who request or are given access to any report on pre-evaluation, evaluation and re-evaluation of other applicants and members;
 - other persons having access to confidential information.
- 3.4.3 The Regional Cooperation Body under evaluation shall advise the regional team members how to treat the documents it has provided. This advice may require the regional team members to:
 - return all documents to the Regional Cooperation Body; or
 - destroy the documentation, when it is determined there is no further need to maintain the documents.
- 3.4.4 Rules for the publication of evaluation reports are outlined in Section 13 of this document.

3.5 Regional Cooperation Body Personnel

- 3.5.1 The personnel of the Regional Cooperation Body involved in a peer evaluation process including Arrangement applications, on-site evaluations and decision-making shall be competent for the functions they perform.
- 3.5.2 In order to ensure that the peer evaluations are carried out effectively and uniformly, the relevant criteria for competence of peer evaluators, including trainees if necessary, shall be defined by the Regional Cooperation Body.
- 3.5.3 Peer evaluators shall meet the requirements as presented in Section XX of Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated MRA-005 Requirements and Procedures for Evaluation of a Single Accreditation Body.

3.6 Other Obligations

- 3.6.1 The Regional Cooperation Body shall:
 - i. Effectively implement tasks assigned to it by Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated.
 - ii. Have evidence of promoting the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated Arrangement with stakeholders.
 - iii. Provide appropriate technical support and enhance harmonisation and education within the region through activities such as workshops, conferences, task groups, etc.
 - iv. Provide peer evaluator training and/or workshops as necessary, taking into account any changes made to the peer evaluation criteria and to the availability of peer evaluators.
 - v. Contribute its fair share of personnel resources for carrying out peer evaluations at the global level. A fair share of personnel resources is based in proportion to the number of MLA/MRA members of a Regional Cooperation Body compared to all Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated Full Members and the MLA/MRA members of other Regional Cooperation Bodies.
 - vi. Ensure that all signatories of the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated Arrangement shall continually fulfil the obligations in Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated MRA-005 Requirements and Procedures for Evaluation of a Single Accreditation Body.
 - vii. Periodically report technical activities to support continuing demonstration of equivalence within the Regional Cooperation Body and between Regional Cooperation Bodies (see Section 11).
- 3.6.2 See obligations in maintenance, suspending and withdrawal of the Regional Cooperation Body (see Section 12).

3.7 Conditions for Application:

- 3.7.1 Sufficient evidence to demonstrate that the Regional Cooperation Body's activities for implementing and maintaining an Arrangement of at least 3 members as full signatories to the Regional Cooperation Body's arrangement for level 3.

NOTE: For extensions to the scope of recognition, each application will be treated on a case-by-case basis by the Arrangement Management Committee.

For Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated, additional category 2 level 4 and/or 5 extensions under the same level 3 scope will be granted on the basis of a region declaration that the level 4/5 scope has been introduced and relevant requirements as defined by Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated have been met.

The additional level 4 and/or 5 scope will be evaluated at the next regional evaluation. In exceptional cases, inclusion of a level 4/5 scope may need evaluation as specifically defined by the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated for the particular level 4/5 scope.

NOTE: For definitions of Levels, please refer to Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated MRA-001: Multilateral Recognition Arrangement: Structure, Scope and Obligations. For reference to the Categorisation of Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated Scopes, please refer to Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated MRA-003: Policies and Procedures for the Expansion of the Scope of the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated Arrangement.

3.7.2 The Regional Cooperation Body shall:

- i. Fulfil the criteria for Membership of Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated.
- ii. Demonstrate the implementation of the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated requirements.

3.7.3 The Regional Cooperation Body agrees to pay for the hotel costs, meals and all travel costs of the regional evaluation team.

3.7.4 Travel shall normally be done in economy class unless the continuous flight time exceeds nine hours. Then the Regional Cooperation Body under evaluation may specify the flight conditions.

3.7.5 The observers and trainees pay all of their own costs.

4. APPOINTMENT OF EVALUATION TEAM

4.1 Appointment and Duties of the Regional Evaluation Team Leader:

4.1.1 In appointing a regional evaluation team leader (TL-R) for a specific evaluation, the Arrangement Management Committee should not appoint the same TL-R for two successive evaluations of the same applicant.

NOTE: It is normal practice that regional evaluators are appointed from as many Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated Full Members as possible.

4.1.2 The TL-R shall be approved and chosen from a list of available TLs on the basis of the TL names and their qualifications provided by the Regional Cooperation Bodies or Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated Full Members. Each TL record shall be accompanied by the scope of experience of the TL. The minimum qualifications of TL-R shall be as described in Clause 4.3.2.

4.1.3 The TL-R shall have ultimate responsibilities for all phases of the evaluation and is delegated authority by the Arrangement Management Committee to make final decisions regarding the conduct of the evaluation.

4.1.4 The Arrangement Management Committee shall arrange periodic training for TL-Rs in order to improve and maintain the harmonisation of regional evaluations.

4.1.5 The Deputy TL-R for a regional evaluation shall have demonstrated that he/she fulfils the conditions referred to in Section 4.3.3 below and performs as an experienced TM-R capable of acting as a TL-R.

NOTE 1: The role of Deputy TL-R may be used as training for future TL-Rs.

NOTE 2: Between the TL-R and the Deputy TL-R, they should collectively have competence of Category 1 and Category 2 Scopes.

4.1.6 Alternatively, a Deputy TL-R may be an approved TL-R, but if assigned to a regional team, the Deputy TL-R shall have different competences than the TL-R to cover as much as possible of the accreditation scopes of the Regional Cooperation Body under evaluation.

4.1.7 The role of the Deputy TL-R is to assist the TL-R in planning, preparing, and managing the regional evaluation, ensuring that the issues and requirements of the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated Arrangement are met. The Deputy TL-R can also replace the TL-R in case of illness or similar circumstances.

4.2 Composition of the Regional Evaluation Team:

4.2.1 For the full regional evaluation visit, members of the regional evaluation team shall be chosen as needed to cover the types of accreditation, and the size and complexity of the Regional Cooperation Body under evaluation.

4.2.2 Regional evaluation team members (TM-Rs) shall be approved and chosen from a list of available TM-Rs provided by the Regional Cooperation Bodies. Each Regional Cooperation Body shall provide the scope of experience for the TM-R. The qualifications of TM-Rs shall be as described in Clause 4.3.3 of this document.

4.2.3 The regional evaluation team (including the TL-R) chosen shall consist of representatives from a cross-section of Regional Cooperation Bodies. The regional evaluation team shall be chosen to provide a balanced set of skills so as to be able to conduct an effective evaluation of the key components of the system under examination.

4.2.4 No team member shall have provided consultancy to the Regional Cooperation Body under evaluation within three years prior to the evaluation.

NOTE 1: There should be no more than one member from each accreditation body represented in the regional evaluation team.

NOTE 2: The TM-Rs should have working knowledge of the English language. Knowledge of the local language should be taken into account.

NOTE 3: Some of the TM-Rs may have as their only task the observing of peer evaluations at different geographical places or at different times than the rest of the team. In the case of observing joint peer evaluations, a TM-R should not observe a person from the same Regional Cooperation Body.

4.3 Requirements for Qualifications of Regional Peer Evaluators:

4.3.1 Selection of Regional Evaluators

- 4.3.1.1 The Arrangement Management Committee shall approve and oversee the performance of regional evaluators in accordance with the criteria in this section.
- 4.3.1.2 Regional Cooperation Bodies may nominate regional evaluators (i.e., TL-R and TM-R) in writing, including a description of their qualifications and the scope covered by each proposed regional evaluator, to the Arrangement Management Committee.

4.3.2 Regional Evaluation Team Leaders (TL-R)

- 4.3.2.1 A TL-R shall meet the requirements of Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated MRA-005 for team leaders and:
 - i. Have successfully participated in at least three peer evaluations of accreditation bodies as a Team Leader (TL), and have participated in at least two decision-making processes at the regional or international level;
 - ii. Have knowledge of the application of Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated requirements that apply to Regional Cooperation Bodies; and
 - iii. Be able to understand and to express themselves clearly in spoken and written English.

4.3.3 Regional Evaluation Team Members (TM-R)

- 4.3.3.1 A TM-R shall meet the requirements of Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated MRA-005 for team members and be able to evaluate whether a Regional Cooperation Body complies with the requirements of this document (Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated MRA-004).
- 4.3.3.2 A TM-R shall be an experienced person within an accreditation body who has relevant working experience with accreditation and shall either be a TL or have served as a TM in two peer evaluations of accreditation bodies.
- 4.3.3.3 In cases where the TM-R is tasked with observing a meeting of the Arrangement Committee (decision-making group), the TM-R shall have participated in at least one decision-making process at the regional or international level.

4.3.4 Regional Evaluator Attributes

- 4.3.4.1 Regional Evaluators shall meet the requirements established in Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated MRA-005, Section 5.

5. MONITORING OF REGIONAL EVALUATORS

- 5.1 With the objective of continual improvement of Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated peer evaluations as an important part of the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated Arrangement, the members of the regional evaluation team shall review the performance of the Team Leader (TL-R), and the TL-R shall review the performance of the team members (TM-Rs).

- 5.2 The team members shall complete the *Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated FMRA-010: Performance Log for Regional Evaluation Team Leader*, and the TL-R shall complete the *Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated FMRA-011: Performance Log for Regional Evaluation Team Members*. These completed forms shall be submitted to the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated MRA Secretariat within 30 days of the completion of the decision-making process for the Regional Cooperation Body under evaluation.
- 5.3 The Regional Cooperation Body being evaluated shall complete the *Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated FMRA-012: Evaluation Team Performance Review by the Evaluated Regional Cooperation Body*, with comments on the performance of the TL-R and each TM-R. This form shall be submitted within 30 days of the completion of the peer evaluation, including the team's final response to any corrective actions.
- 5.4 The Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated MRA Secretariat shall collect the completed performance review forms and provide a summary of the results to the Chair of the Arrangement Management Committee. The Secretariat shall also ensure that the results are forwarded in a timely manner to the relevant regional representative, if applicable.

6. EVALUATION PROCESS

6.1 Introduction

The task of an evaluation of a Regional Cooperation Body is to collect sufficient information about the evaluation and decision-making processes of the Regional Cooperation Body to have confidence in the results from conformity assessment bodies accredited by signatory accreditation bodies of the Regional Cooperation Body.

It is the task of the TL-R to create a timetable (in a timely manner) prior to the evaluation of the Regional Cooperation Body that allows sufficient time to collect information for obtaining such confidence. The names of the accreditation bodies and the region's evaluators for the observed evaluations shall not be identified in the full evaluation report and that includes the evaluation timetable and the observed evaluation reports. However, a full record of the names of the accreditation bodies and the region's evaluators for the observed evaluations shall be separately maintained and provided to the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated MRA Secretariat.

The evaluation process of a Regional Cooperation Body involves the evaluation of the operations of the Regional Cooperation Body Secretariat and decision-making process, and the collection and analysis of information gained from observing evaluations of accreditation bodies done by the Regional Cooperation Body.

6.2 Evaluation Program

6.2.1 The process for the initial evaluation of a Regional Cooperation Body

A regional evaluation team of at least two persons, depending on the number of scopes of Arrangements handled by the Regional Cooperation Body Secretariat (one of whom shall be the TL-R), shall be appointed by the Arrangement Management Committee. This regional evaluation team shall evaluate the region to ensure it complies with the requirements of Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated MRA-004. The regional evaluation team will also ensure the region follows the requirements of Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated MRA-005 in undertaking evaluations of accreditation bodies.

For the evaluation of the Regional Cooperation Body Secretariat, three days should be sufficient. The regional evaluation team shall also observe at least three evaluations done by the region. These shall be evaluations that collectively encompass the scopes of the Arrangement applied for by the region.

In addition, the TL-R or a designate shall observe at least one process of the Decision Making Group, preferably involving the decision-making for an observed evaluation. The planning of such processes and their frequency will determine the total duration of the evaluation.

6.2.2 The process for the re-evaluation of a recognised Regional Cooperation Body

A regional evaluation team of at least two persons, depending on the number of scopes of Arrangements handled by the Regional Cooperation Body Secretariat (one of whom shall be the TL-R), shall be appointed by the Arrangement Management Committee. This regional evaluation team shall re-evaluate the region to ensure it continues to comply with the requirements of Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated MRA-004. The regional evaluation team will also ensure the region follows the requirements of Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated MRA-005 in undertaking evaluations of accreditation bodies.

For the re-evaluation of the Regional Cooperation Body Secretariat, two days should be sufficient. The regional evaluation team shall, in consultation with the region being evaluated, select at least two evaluations to observe. As far as practicable, these should be evaluations of full scope accreditation bodies. Such observations should occur as closely in time as possible (preferably less than six months apart).

During this process, the regional evaluation team shall also evaluate the decision-making process, preferably involving the decision-making for an observed evaluation.

Consideration could be given to using electronic techniques/via teleconference (i.e. remote processes) for some of these evaluation activities.

These re-evaluation activities (secretariat, observations, and decision making) shall be completed, reported on, and considered by the Arrangement Committee (MRAC) separately.

6.2.3 Other factors

Factors that may influence the duration of the evaluation of the region include:

- Need for translators;
- Extensive travel and travel circumstances; and
- Cultural differences in a region.

6.3 Managing the Regional Evaluation

6.3.1 Preparation and planning

The time required for regional evaluators to prepare the evaluation depends on the completeness of the documentation, the complexity of the evaluation (initial, renewal, or scope extension), the breadth of areas covered, and the availability and clarity of supporting documents.

The Regional Cooperation Body shall complete the relevant portions of the *Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated FMRA-013 Report Template for the Evaluation of a Regional Cooperation Body*, and the Regional Cooperation Body's documentation references in the *Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated FMRA-014 Report on the Evaluation of the Secretariat* as part of the documents provided for document review by the regional evaluation team.

The Regional Cooperation Body will submit their completed Report Template to the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated evaluation team as part of the application documents. The evaluation team, as part of its preparation, shall review the narrative framework and the related/referenced documents provided by the Regional Cooperation Body to determine, in principle, conformance to the requirements and revise or comment on the narrative, as appropriate. The output of this process, an amended narrative, functions as a summary of the policies and processes found in the Regional Cooperation Body's documents.

A complete document review is performed by the regional evaluation team, resulting in a report on conformity to the requirements. The Regional Cooperation Body should be provided an opportunity to respond to the report before proceeding with the evaluation of the Regional Cooperation Body Secretariat.

6.3.2 Timeframes for document review

The following timeframes apply for the review of the Regional Cooperation Body documentation:

1. **Within eight weeks** of receiving the required documentation from the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated MRA Secretariat, the evaluation team members shall submit their completed document review outcomes to the TL-R for review and comment.
Timeline: 8 weeks
NOTE: One week is equivalent to seven natural days.
2. **Within two weeks** of receiving the team members' document review outcomes, the TL-R shall review the findings and submit the completed document review report to the Regional Group MLA/MRA Chair and secretariat.
Timeline: 10 weeks in total
3. **Within two weeks** of receiving the document review report, the Regional Cooperation Body shall provide a written response to the TL-R and relevant TM-R:
 - a. Identifying any finding(s) that the Regional Cooperation Body does not agree with, including an explanation of why the Regional Cooperation Body does not agree with the finding(s);
 - b. Proposed corrective actions and timeframes for implementation for each of the agreed nonconformities. It is preferable to respond before the Secretariat visit, and if not, the corrective action should be sent with the responses to the Secretariat's visit.

Timeline: 12 weeks in total

4. **Within two weeks** of receiving the written response from the Regional Cooperation Body, the TL-R shall inform the Regional Cooperation Body whether the regional evaluation team has agreed that it is ready to proceed with the evaluation. Any delays shall be reported to the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated MRA Secretariat.

Timeline: Within 14 weeks of receiving the required documentation

The TL-R shall provide a copy of the proposed timetable for the evaluation to the Regional Cooperation Body Secretariat in a timely manner prior to the visit.

NOTE: It is preferable to perform the evaluation of the Regional Cooperation Body Secretariat before any observation of peer evaluations.

Summary Timeframes for Document Review

Step	Action	Responsible	Deadline	Cumulative Timeline
1	<i>Submit completed document review outcomes to the TL-R</i>	<i>Evaluation Team Members</i>	<i>Within 8 weeks of receiving documentation from the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated MRA Secretariat</i>	<i>Week 8</i>
2	<i>Review findings and submit the completed document review report to the Regional Cooperation Body's MLA/MRA Chair and Secretariat</i>	<i>TL-R</i>	<i>Within 2 weeks of receiving the team members' outcomes</i>	<i>Week 10</i>
3	<i>Submit written response: a) Disagreement explanation (if any) b) Corrective actions and implementation timeline</i>	<i>Regional Cooperation Body</i>	<i>Within 2 weeks of receiving the document review report</i>	<i>Week 12</i>
4	<i>Notify readiness to proceed; report any delays to the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated MRA Secretariat</i>	<i>TL-R</i>	<i>Within 2 weeks of receiving the Regional Cooperation Body's response</i>	<i>Week 14</i>

6.3.3 Evaluation of the Regional Cooperation Body Secretariat

The visit to the Regional Cooperation Body Secretariat typically consists of:

- An opening meeting, including a presentation by the TL-R outlining the aims, objectives, and procedures to be used by the regional evaluation team;
- Evaluation of the Regional Cooperation Body's management system and administration of the Arrangement, including review of files and records;
- A closing meeting to present a brief written summary report using the template for the Report on the Regional Evaluation of the Secretariat (Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated FMRA-014), and discussion of the findings (both confirmed and provisional) with the Regional Cooperation Body Secretariat; and

- Observation of the decision-making group processes. When performed before the Regional Cooperation Body Secretariat visit, the observations should be discussed on this occasion; they need to be incorporated into the final report as well.

Typical Schedule

Hours Scheduled	Actions	Evaluators
4 hours	Preparation with the regional evaluation team	TL-R + 1 TM-R
8–10 hours	Office visit, opening meeting, studying records (split regional evaluation team)	TL-R + 1 TM-R
8–10 hours	Studying records (split team), preparing a brief written summary report, a list of findings, closing meeting	TL-R + 1 TM-R

6.3.4 Additional activities

In addition, the following activities shall be accomplished by the TL-R and/or TM-R(s):

- Observing evaluations conducted by the Regional Cooperation Body;
- Providing feedback to the peer evaluation team being observed to obtain clarification and/or express initial observations that may or may not result in a finding;
- Reporting the observations and any findings for each observed evaluation to the rest of the regional evaluation team and the Regional Cooperation Body as soon as possible using the *Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated FMRA-015: Observation Report Template*;
- Observing and reporting on decision-making group processes, preferably those where the decision will be taken on one or more of the evaluations observed; the *Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated FMRA-016: Decision-Making Process Evaluation Template* shall be used for this report.
- Observing other meetings (e.g., training or technical committees), if given the opportunity;
- Reviewing corrective actions proposed by the Regional Cooperation Body and commenting on the proposals;
- Preparing the final full evaluation report with an opportunity for the Regional Cooperation Body to comment;
- Amending the report and writing the recommendation to the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated Arrangement Management Committee.

7. EVALUATION REPORTING

7.1 Steps in Evaluation Reporting on a Regional Cooperation Body

Each one of the reports listed below shall be finalised and provided to the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated MRA Secretariat, as appropriate, within the timelines specified below.

7.1.1 Preparation of findings and reports on evaluation activities

The reporting of all regional evaluation activities shall be done using the report templates provided by Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated for the following activities:

- Regional Cooperation Body Secretariat visit (Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated FMRA-014)
- Observations of peer evaluations (Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated FMRA-015)
- Observation of the decision-making (Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated FMRA-016)

The following timeframe applies to the reporting of all regional evaluation activities listed above:

1. Providing oral feedback at the completion of each evaluation activity to obtain clarification and/or express initial observations that may or may not result in a finding. In the case of the Regional Cooperation Body Secretariat visit, in addition to the oral feedback, the TL-R and/or TM-R shall prepare a brief written summary report, including as an appendix, the non-conformities and comments presented, preferably in table format, and provide this to the Regional Cooperation Body at the closing meeting.
2. With respect to the observation and decision-making steps, within two weeks of the evaluation activity, the responsible TM-R shall provide a written report of the nonconformities using the appropriate template to the TL-R, including advising the TL-R of any areas of disagreement between the Regional Cooperation Body's peer evaluation team and the TM-R arising from the feedback.
3. Within two weeks of receiving the written report of the findings, the TL-R shall, after reviewing the findings with the TM-R, forward the findings to the Regional Cooperation Body's MLA/MRA Chair and Secretariat, with a copy also sent to the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated MRA Secretariat.

Timeline: 4 weeks in total

7.1.2 Formal response of the Regional Cooperation Body to findings and reports

1. Within eight weeks of receiving a written non-conformity or report from an evaluation activity, the Regional Cooperation Body shall provide a written response to the TL-R and relevant TM-R, including:
 - a) The evaluated Regional Cooperation Body must respond to each non-conformity by undertaking a required cause analysis, including the extent of the finding and its impact, and by taking appropriate action (correction and/or corrective action). The Regional Cooperation Body must provide the regional peer evaluation team with evidence of the cause analysis and an action plan and time schedule for implementation of the action(s) related to the non-conformity(ies).

Based on the risk associated with a finding, the Regional Cooperation Body may also be required to provide evidence of the effective implementation of the actions (see 7.1.2 (2) and (3) below). Wherever possible, the need for such evidence shall be stated in the summary report prepared at the end of each evaluation activity.

NOTE 1: Although this paragraph allows eight weeks to respond to the non-conformity, it is important that the Regional Cooperation Body commence action as soon as the non-conformity is identified.

NOTE 2: The Regional Cooperation Body is also encouraged to respond to comments.

Timeline: 8 weeks

- b) Identifying any finding(s) that the Regional Cooperation Body does not agree with, including an explanation of why the Regional Cooperation Body does not agree with the finding(s). If a Regional Cooperation Body does not agree with a finding, the TL-R shall forward the finding to the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated MRA Secretariat for advice by the Chair of the Arrangement Management Committee. The Chair may advise that the finding be changed or marked as an unresolved issue for consideration by the Arrangement Management Committee or a designated Task Force Group (TFG). Irrespective of any advice given, it remains the responsibility of the TL-R to decide how the finding is to be treated in the report.
2. For re-evaluations, within twelve weeks from the date of receipt of the combined table of non-conformities, the Regional Cooperation Body shall provide initial evidence of implemented corrective actions.

Timeline: 12 weeks from receipt of combined findings

3. For initial evaluations, the Regional Cooperation Body seeks to achieve the same timeframes as expected for re-evaluations; however, it is understood that this may not always be possible. Extended timeframes may indicate a need for additional regional evaluation activities.

The Regional Cooperation Body shall provide evidence of implemented corrective actions no later than nine months from the date of receipt of the combined table of non-conformities. Except in exceptional cases, the evaluation shall lapse if the applicant Regional Cooperation Body is unable to provide acceptable evidence of implemented corrective actions within nine months of the date of issue. When a regional evaluation has lapsed, the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated MRA Secretariat shall seek advice from the relevant Arrangement Management Committee Chair on how to proceed.

Timeline: 3–9 months from the combined table of findings

7.1.3 Formal reply by the regional evaluation team to the Regional Cooperation Body's responses

1. Within two weeks of receiving a formal response from the Regional Cooperation Body, the TM-R shall provide a formal reply to the TL-R.

2. Within two weeks of receiving the reply from the TM-R, the TL-R shall, after reviewing it with the TM-R, forward the formal reply to the Regional Cooperation Body MLA/MRA Chair and Secretariat.

NOTE: This process may involve multiple iterations. Regional Cooperation Bodies must remain mindful of the requirement in 7.1.2 (2) that initial evidence of corrective actions should be provided within three months from receipt of the written report.

Timeline: 4 weeks after receiving the formal response from the Regional Cooperation Body.

7.1.4 Compilation of the full report

1. Within four weeks of receiving all Regional Cooperation Body responses to non-conformities and reports, the TL-R shall combine the reports and, with the consent of the evaluation team, send the draft full report *Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated FMRA-013: Report Template for the Evaluation of a Regional Cooperation Body*, to the Regional Cooperation Body MLA/MRA Chair and Secretariat for review and comment.
2. Within four weeks of receiving the draft full report, the Regional Cooperation Body shall provide a written response to the TL-R confirming acceptance or otherwise of the report.
3. Within four weeks of receiving the Regional Cooperation Body's response, the TL-R shall seek the consent of the TM-R(s) to submit the final report to the Regional Cooperation Body MLA/MRA Chair and Secretariat.

Timeline: 12 weeks after receiving the formal response from the Regional Cooperation Body

7.2 Classification of Findings

- **Finding:** General term used to describe the result of an evaluation activity.
- **Non-conformity:** A finding where the Regional Cooperation Body does not meet a requirement of any applicable standard(s), its own management system, or Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated MRA-004.
- **Comment:** A finding where the requirements related to the Regional Cooperation Body's practices or documented information are fulfilled, but there is potential for improvement.

8. EVALUATION SUMMARY REPORT FOR DECISION-MAKING PURPOSES

The Arrangement Management Committee shall prepare an Evaluation Summary Report to be presented to the Arrangement Committee (MRAC) to support decision-making regarding the recognition of a Regional Cooperation Body.

This report shall contain the following:

- **Regional Cooperation Body:**
- **Regional evaluation team:**
- **Identification of the full report:**

- **Evaluation sites and dates:**
 - Regional Cooperation Body's secretariat:
 - AB evaluations observed:
 - Regional Cooperation Body's Decision-Making Group meeting(s):
- **Scope of evaluation:**
- **General Information regarding the Regional Cooperation Body:**
 - Number of Arrangement signatories:
 - Scopes of the Arrangement:
 - Number of members:
 - Organisational structure:
 - Decision-making process:
- **Findings of the regional evaluation team (non-conformities and comments):**
- **Conclusions:**
 - Statements of closeout of non-conformities:
 - Unresolved issues:
 - Conclusion and recommendation:

Note: In cases where a Task Force Group (TFG) reviews the report and completes an evaluation summary report on behalf of the Arrangement Management Committee, this report may address TFG remarks and conclusions, composition of the TFG, and comments on the process. Issues for consideration may include:

- Were Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated procedures followed?
- Were the appropriate normative documents applied?
- Does the report contain sufficient information to support a decision?
- Are the conclusions and recommendations supported by the report?
- Are the non-conformities appropriately classified, clear, and concise?
- Is the proposed/implemented corrective action appropriate to the non-conformity?
- Were the non-conformities appropriately resolved and documented?
- Were there any issues raised by the TFG that required a response from the team?

9. DECISION-MAKING REGARDING EVALUATIONS OF REGIONAL COOPERATION BODIES

9.1 Decision-Making Regarding Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated Regional Evaluations

9.1.1 The evaluation report, the corrective actions, and the recommendations of the regional evaluation team shall be submitted as the final report to the Arrangement Management Committee.

9.1.2 The Arrangement Management Committee may prepare a summary report for the Arrangement Committee (MRAC), which is the decision-making body for the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated Arrangement. The MRAC shall decide:

- In the case of an initial evaluation, whether or not the Regional Cooperation Body will be recognised under the appropriate scopes of the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated Arrangement.
- In the case of a re-evaluation, whether or not the Regional Cooperation Body will remain recognised under the appropriate scopes of the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated Arrangement. Positive decisions can be accompanied by conditions (see Clause 9.2).

NOTE 1: The MRAC may decide to carry out a re-evaluation, partly or totally, prior to the normal four-year period. Normally, this would be the case after initial evaluations or fundamental reorganisations.

NOTE 2: For voting rules, see the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated Bylaws.

9.1.3 The MRAC shall ensure that there are no conflicts of interest involved in the decision-making process (i.e., excluding from the voting any member of the Regional Cooperation Body being voted upon and any persons directly involved in the evaluation of that region).

9.2 Decision-Making Regarding Evaluations

9.2.1 The Arrangement Management Committee will appoint a Task Force Group (TFG), with four to six members, to review the evaluation report. The Arrangement Management Committee will appoint one of the TFG members to be the convener. The TFG members shall be members of the Arrangement Management Committee. It is also possible for the Arrangement Management Committee to assign other experienced Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated members from outside the Arrangement Management Committee. All TFG members shall have signed a confidentiality statement. The evaluation team and the evaluated Regional Cooperation Body shall be informed about the establishment of the TFG and its members.

9.2.2 All members and observers of the Arrangement Management Committee will have access to the evaluation report and may send their comments to the TFG for consideration.

9.2.3 The task of the TFG is to evaluate the report for comprehensiveness, clarity, and the classification of findings, and to prepare a proposed Evaluation Summary Report. The TFG shall provide the proposed Evaluation Summary Report to the Arrangement Management Committee within 30 days of receiving the evaluation report. The Evaluation Summary Report template can be found in Section 8 of this procedure.

9.2.4 The TFG is expected to communicate with the evaluation team and, if necessary, with the evaluated Regional Cooperation Body to resolve any open, missing, or unclear issues in the report. The Arrangement Management Committee Chair shall be copied on all communications.

9.2.5 TFG competencies:

- 9.2.5.1 The TFG will need to have an understanding of what should be in a report from a generic and specific perspective. The TFG shall have collective expertise at Levels 1, 2, and 3 of the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated MRA.
- 9.2.5.2 The TFG needs to understand the planning and conduct of the evaluation, its breadth and depth, the findings and their classification, and the adequacy of the conclusions and recommendations. The competencies required would be consistent with that of an individual with experience as a conformity assessment body (CAB) auditor or an accreditation body (AB) assessor, and exposure to the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated MRA documentation, including Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated MRA-004, Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated MRA-005, and related Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated procedures, as well as practical experience in the peer evaluation process.
- 9.2.5.3 To be able to effectively correspond with the team, the TFG convener requires good communication skills and an understanding of the criteria and process. The competencies would be similar to those listed in 9.2.5.2 above.
- 9.2.5.4 At least one member appointed to the TFG shall be a qualified peer evaluator.
- 9.2.5.5 There should be a balance of members with competencies across the scopes of the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated MRA.
- 9.2.5.6 The Arrangement Management Committee will review the draft Evaluation Summary Report prepared by the TFG within 30 days after its receipt and make any changes as necessary before submitting it to the MRAC for the decision-making process.

9.3 Hierarchy of Decisions

- 9.3.1 Decisions made as a result of peer evaluations of Regional Cooperation Bodies can take many forms. Implicit in these decisions is the possibility of a variety of “conditions.” This section outlines a hierarchy of the major types of decisions from the most positive to the least positive (i.e., conditions of increasing severity are imposed).
- 9.3.2 Decisions on applicant Regional Cooperation Bodies and on the ongoing re-evaluations of recognised Regional Cooperation Bodies reside with the MRAC. Recognition of a Regional Cooperation Body is a prerequisite for signatories of its Arrangement to attain and maintain signatory status with the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated Arrangement.
- 9.3.3 The MRAC shall make all decisions on recognition of a Regional Cooperation Body within 30 days after the review made by the Arrangement Management Committee. The persons participating in the decision-making shall have an understanding of the objective and purpose of the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated Arrangement, the criteria used for the evaluation, the evaluation process, and the Arrangement structure. There are primarily two situations to address: New Applicant Regional Cooperation Bodies and Recognised Regional Cooperation Bodies. A third situation that is not addressed below is the possibility of adverse decisions or conditions imposed on a recognised Regional Cooperation Body that fails to abide by its obligations for recognition.

9.3.4 Decisions on new applicant Regional Cooperation Bodies may include:

- Approval without conditions (re-evaluation to occur four years hence);

- Approval with conditions (e.g., shortened interval for re-evaluation);
- Defer recognition pending submittal of required evidence of corrective actions and/or a re-visit by one or more members of the evaluation team to confirm implementation of corrective actions;
- Delay the decision on recognition pending a new evaluation; or
- Disapproval for New Applicant Regional Cooperation Bodies should rarely happen since an evaluation report is only submitted for a decision once a consensus of the regional evaluation team and the Arrangement Management Committee has concluded that all requirements have been met.

9.3.5 Decisions on Recognised Regional Cooperation Bodies may include:

- Approval without conditions (re-evaluation to occur four years hence);
- Approval with conditions (e.g., shortened interval for re-evaluation);
- Defer re-approval pending submittal of required evidence of corrective actions and/or a re-visit by one or more members of the evaluation team;
- Reduction of recognition for one or more scopes of the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated Arrangement; or
- Withdrawal of recognition, subject to the Appeals Process. (A new application and evaluation of the Regional Cooperation Body would be required to reinstate recognition. Re-evaluation of signatories of the formerly recognised Regional Cooperation Body would become the responsibility of Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated.)

10. APPEALS

10.1 Scope

This section describes the procedures for appeals, to ensure that matters related to the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated Arrangement are settled objectively and impartially.

10.2 Handling of Appeals

10.2.1 When an applicant, a Regional Cooperation Body, or a recognised Regional Cooperation Body does not agree with the decision, it may appeal in writing to the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated Secretariat within 30 days from notification of the decision.

10.2.2 After authentication of the appeal, the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated Secretariat shall inform the Chairperson of Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated, who will, in conjunction with the Chairperson of the Arrangement Management Committee, appoint an Appeals Panel comprising two impartial representatives of Full Members of Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated and one Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated evaluator from outside the appellant Regional Cooperation Body to investigate the appeal.

- 10.2.3 No member of the Appeals Panel shall have been involved in the regional evaluation team that evaluated the appellant, or have a direct interest in the subject of the appeal in any form. The Chairperson of Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated shall ensure that the composition of the Appeals Panel satisfies the requirements of objectivity and impartiality and that no conflict of interest exists. The Appeals Panel should normally be set up within 30 days after authentication of the appeal.
- 10.2.4 The appellant has the right to object to the appointment of any member of the Appeals Panel for valid reason(s). The Chairperson of Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated, in conjunction with the Chairperson of the Arrangement Management Committee, shall make a decision on any objection by the appellant to an appointment. That decision shall be final.
- 10.2.5 During the course of the Regional Cooperation Body's appeal against suspension or withdrawal of its recognition, the recognition shall remain in effect.

10.3 Recommendation and Decision

- 10.3.1 The Appeals Panel shall decide its recommendation on the appeal within six months after setting up the panel and shall inform the Chairperson of Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated and the Arrangement Management Committee in writing of the recommendation no later than five (5) business days after the date of the decision.
- 10.3.2 The Arrangement Management Committee shall forward the recommendation to the Arrangement Committee (MRAC) for a decision.
- 10.3.3 That decision shall be final and communicated to the appellant.

11. RE-EVALUATION OF REGIONAL COOPERATION BODIES AND ONGOING CONFIDENCE-BUILDING ACTIVITIES

- 11.1 Periodic monitoring and re-evaluation of the Regional Cooperation Body is necessary (see also Section 6 of this document).
- 11.2 All recognised Regional Cooperation Bodies shall be formally re-evaluated at maximum intervals of four years from the last day of the previous evaluation of the Secretariat.
- 11.3 The Regional Cooperation Body under re-evaluation shall provide the regional evaluation team with all the documents which are required for an initial evaluation (see the Application of a Regional Cooperation Body to Join the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated Arrangement, Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated FMRA-008) at least three months prior to the re-evaluation visit. In addition, the regional evaluation team shall receive the full evaluation report from the last evaluation (and any special evaluation) from the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated MRA Secretariat.
- 11.4 Partial or total re-evaluation may be conducted at an earlier date as directed by the Arrangement Committee (MRAC), should there be due cause such as notification of significant changes in administration, finances, operational practices, or an extension of the scope(s) of the Arrangement.
- 11.5 The impact of changes notified by a recognised Regional Cooperation Body shall be evaluated (see Section 12 of this document).
- 11.6 Re-evaluation visits should be led by a Regional Evaluation Team Leader (TL-R) other than the one who led the previous evaluation.

11.7 To the greatest extent possible, in the absence of a specific evaluation objective, the scope of each re-evaluation should seek to avoid simply duplicating the preceding evaluations in terms of both the regional peer evaluators being observed and the accreditation bodies being evaluated by the region.

11.8 Ongoing joint evaluations (evaluations of accreditation bodies by more than one Regional Cooperation Body) to maintain confidence in the regional evaluations shall be conducted and reported on as agreed by the MRAC.

11.9 In addition to attending Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated General Assembly and Committee meetings, Regional Cooperation Bodies are encouraged to take part in a number of joint activities.

Examples of such activity include:

- Joint signatory membership of Regional Cooperation Bodies (e.g., some signatories to one Regional Cooperation Body's Arrangement may also be signatories to another Regional Cooperation Body's Arrangement). This includes joint participation in evaluations.
- Attendance (by invitation as an observer) at other Regional Cooperation Bodies' Arrangement Council meetings or Regional Decision-Making Group meetings (especially by members/Chairs of such Committees or Councils).
- Participation in other Regional Cooperation Bodies' peer evaluator training courses.

11.10 All Regional Cooperation Bodies shall provide a report each year to the Arrangement Management Committee on their Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated Arrangement activities. Such reports should include any joint activities, as outlined above, and be provided to the next TL-R, who will evaluate the Regional Cooperation Body.

12. MAINTENANCE, SUSPENSION, AND WITHDRAWAL OF THE REGIONAL COOPERATION BODIES

12.1 Notification of Change

12.1.1 Each recognised Regional Cooperation Body shall report any significant changes in its status and/or its operating practices (e.g., as listed below) and the impact of the change without delay to all Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated Arrangement signatories through the Arrangement Management Committee.

- Legal status;
- Management personnel;
- Contact person or liaison officer for the Arrangement;
- Operational Arrangement program;
- Criteria and procedures related to the Arrangement;
- Office address (and postal address, if different), including head office and any offices; and
- Other changes that significantly affect the competence or credibility of the Regional Cooperation Body.

12.1.2 The Regional Cooperation Body shall notify the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated MRA Secretariat without delay of any significant changes that have occurred or will occur in its status. The Regional Cooperation Body shall report to the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated MRA Secretariat on new signatories and/or withdrawal of existing signatories of its Arrangement and provide information on new signatories as required by the Secretariat. Upon request by the Arrangement Management Committee, the Regional Cooperation Body shall inform the Arrangement Management Committee about decisions on evaluations and re-evaluations, including providing access to evaluation reports, as well as the plan for future evaluations within its Arrangement.

12.1.3 The Regional Cooperation Body shall give an annual update to the Arrangement Management Committee for consideration of the changes and, if necessary, for recommendation to the Arrangement Committee (MRAC). The MRAC shall be informed about the annual updates of the Regional Cooperation Body (see Section 11.8).

12.2 Maintenance, Suspension, or Withdrawal

12.2.1 It may be that the Arrangement Management Committee cannot accept the significant changes notified by a Regional Cooperation Body, the corrective action taken on non-conformities, or substantiated complaints from interested parties. The Arrangement Management Committee shall report the situation to the MRAC with a recommendation and ask the MRAC to take appropriate action. This action can be suspension for a maximum period of six months or withdrawal from the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated Arrangement.

12.2.2 Maintenance, suspension, or withdrawal of a recognised Regional Cooperation Body shall be decided by the MRAC after receipt of the recommendation by the Arrangement Management Committee in accordance with the same procedures used for acceptance of a Regional Cooperation Body. Any suspension or withdrawal decided by the MRAC shall be accompanied by an appropriate explanation stating the reason to the Regional Cooperation Body.

12.2.3 In the case of suspension or withdrawal, the Regional Cooperation Body may appeal against the decision in accordance with Section 10 (Appeals).

12.2.4 A Regional Cooperation Body that has been suspended or withdrawn shall no longer be recognised by Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated.

12.2.5 In the event of suspension, Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated shall:

- officially notify the Regional Cooperation Body of the suspension, the reasons, the period, and the conditions for lifting the suspension;
- prior to taking further action on the decision to suspend, notify the Regional Cooperation Body of its right to appeal the decision;
- if the appeal is not upheld, amend the list of Arrangement signatories to identify that the Regional Cooperation Body is suspended;
- notify all Arrangement signatories of the suspension; and
- remind the Regional Cooperation Body of the consequences of suspension.

12.2.6 The consequences of suspension shall be decided by the MRAC on a case-by-case basis, depending on the reason for suspension. The consequences of suspension

may include, for the applicable main scope and/or sub-scope, that the Regional Cooperation Body shall:

- a) not actively promote the fact that they are a signatory to the Arrangement;
- b) advise that the signatories do not participate in any ballots associated with the Arrangement;
- c) notify all signatories to the Arrangement of the suspension and the consequences of the suspension as it relates to them; and
- d) notify stakeholders in their economies of the suspension.

12.2.7 The obligations of the Regional Cooperation Body while suspended are to:

- a) continue to comply with the obligations of Full Membership;
- b) cooperate fully with the Arrangement Management Committee and MRAC to enable a speedy resolution of the suspension;
- c) maintain oversight of their signatories; and
- d) advise that the signatories continue to vote on Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated ballots other than those associated with the Arrangement.

12.2.8 If the recognition of the Regional Cooperation Body is suspended, it shall inform its recognised signatories and applicants that their signatory status will remain unchanged during the suspension period. Any new signatory or applicant to the Arrangement during the suspension period is not covered by the Arrangement and is not recognised by Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated.

12.2.9 In the event of withdrawal, Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated shall:

- a) officially notify the Regional Cooperation Body of the withdrawal and the reasons;
- b) prior to taking further action on the decision to withdraw, notify the Regional Cooperation Body of its right to appeal the decision;
- c) if the appeal is not upheld, amend the list of Arrangement signatories to identify that the body is withdrawn; and
- d) notify all Arrangement signatories of the withdrawal.

12.2.10 If the recognition of the Regional Cooperation Body is withdrawn, it shall inform all applicants and signatories of its Arrangement that the Regional Cooperation Body and its signatories are no longer accepted under the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated Arrangement and shall no longer make reference to the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated Arrangement.

12.2.11 When a withdrawn Regional Cooperation Body applies to become recognised again, the procedure for new applicants shall be followed.

13. DISCLOSURE OF EVALUATION REPORTS

Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated is the owner of the reports on the peer evaluations of the Regional Cooperation Bodies that it manages. Reports from regional evaluations managed by Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated shall not, in general, be made available in the public domain.

An evaluated Regional Cooperation Body may, however, choose to make the full report available to its interested parties for the purpose of promoting the acceptance of the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated Arrangement under the conditions detailed below:

- 13.1 The evaluation report shall not be disclosed until it has been formally considered by the Arrangement Committee (MRAC) and a decision has been confirmed.
- 13.2 The Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated MRA Secretariat shall provide to the Regional Cooperation Body the documents that may be disclosed to the relevant interested parties upon request from the Regional Cooperation Body. The documents shall include the full evaluation report, including the responses to the findings and all other annexes, and the MRAC resolution(s) related to the peer evaluation. All references to any specific Accreditation Bodies (ABs), Conformity Assessment Bodies (CABs), and names of evaluators or assessors, as applicable, shall be removed by the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated MRA Secretariat from the documents.
- 13.3 The documentation provided by the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated MRA Secretariat to the Regional Cooperation Body shall be disclosed collectively together with an appropriate statement as to the confidential nature of the information, i.e., the information shall remain confidential to the evaluated Regional Cooperation Body and the recipient.

14. AMENDMENT TABLE

Section	Previous Version	Summary Of Changes

ANNEX 1 - STEP-BY-STEP PEER EVALUATION PROCESS OF A REGIONAL COOPERATION BODY

This annex provides an informative, step-by-step description of the peer evaluation process for a Regional Cooperation Body within the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated Arrangement.

It is intended as a navigational guide to help applicants, evaluation teams, and decision-making bodies follow the sequence of activities from application through post-decision actions.

The annex does not introduce any new requirements beyond those already established in the main sections of this document. Instead, it consolidates and organises existing requirements in the order in which they occur in practice.

For the detailed criteria, forms, timelines, and procedural requirements, the relevant sections of this document shall be consulted.

1. Application process

- 1.1 The Regional Cooperation Body shall complete Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated FMRA-008: Application of a Regional Cooperation Body to join the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated Arrangement and submit it to the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated MRA Secretariat.
- 1.2 Upon receipt, the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated MRA Secretariat shall review the application and complete Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated FMRA-009: Check Report on Regional Cooperation Body Application to verify the completeness and adequacy of the submission.
- 1.3 If the application is incomplete, the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated MRA Secretariat shall request the additional documentation or clarifications from the Regional Cooperation Body.
- 1.4 Once the application is considered complete, the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated MRA Secretariat shall forward it to the Arrangement Management Committee for consideration.
- 1.5 If the Arrangement Management Committee does not approve the application, the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated MRA Secretariat shall communicate with the Regional Cooperation Body to clarify the decision and provide guidance for resubmission if applicable.
- 1.6 If the Arrangement Management Committee approves the application, an evaluation team shall be appointed by the Arrangement Management Committee, in accordance with the criteria and procedures outlined in Section 4: Appointment of Evaluation Team of this document.
- 1.7 The Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated MRA Secretariat shall inform the Regional Cooperation Body of the proposed evaluation team, who may object to the appointment. If no objection is presented, the process will continue with the full evaluation according to Section 6: Evaluation process of this document.
- 1.8 If the Regional Cooperation Body withdraws its application at any stage prior to completion of the evaluation, the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated MRA Secretariat shall close the application process and inform the Arrangement Management Committee.

2. Coordination of evaluation logistics

- 2.1 Upon confirmation of the evaluation team, the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated MRA Secretariat shall coordinate with the Regional Cooperation Body and the Team Leader – Regional (TL-R) to agree on the scope, dates, sites to be visited, observations to be conducted, and logistical arrangements.
- 2.2 The Regional Cooperation Body shall provide the evaluation team with all documentation necessary for the evaluation in accordance with the timelines established in Section 6 of this document.

3. Document review

- 3.1 The evaluation team shall review the documentation provided by the Regional Cooperation Body and prepare for the on-site and observation activities as described in Section 6.
- 3.2 Any questions or requests for clarification arising from the document review shall be communicated to the Regional Cooperation Body through the Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated MRA Secretariat.

4. Evaluation activities

- 4.1 The evaluation activities, including the visit to the Regional Cooperation Body Secretariat, the observation of peer evaluations, and the observation of the decision-making process, shall be conducted in accordance with Section 6 of this document.
- 4.2 Written findings shall be prepared and provided to the Regional Cooperation Body in accordance with Section 7 of this document.

5. Corrective actions and follow-up

- 5.1 The Regional Cooperation Body shall respond to any non-conformities and provide evidence of corrective actions within the timelines specified in Section 7 of this document.
- 5.2 The evaluation team shall review the responses and determine the adequacy of the actions taken.

6. Decision-making

- 6.1 The Arrangement Management Committee shall prepare an Evaluation Summary Report in accordance with Section 8 and submit it to the Arrangement Committee (MRAC) for decision in accordance with Section 9.
- 6.2 If the decision is adverse, the Regional Cooperation Body may appeal in accordance with Section 10.

7. Post-decision actions

- 7.1 Recognition, maintenance, suspension, withdrawal, and re-evaluation shall follow the provisions of Sections 11 and 12 of this document.
- 7.2 Disclosure of evaluation reports shall be handled in accordance with Section 13 of this document.