



CO-OPERATIVE INFORMATION SHEET

Co-operative Principles

MIS202: V2.1 - 19 January 2010

The International Co-operative Alliance is the peak international organisation for co-operatives. Founded in 1895 and often known as the ICA, it has 222 member organisations from 91 countries representing more than 800 million individuals worldwide.

The ICA adopted a Statement on the Co-operative Identity in 1937 and has undertaken reviews of these Co-operative Principles in 1966 and 1995. These reviews modernised the idea of co-operation, maintained its relevance and provided an up-to-date test of whether an organisation is qualified to call itself a co-operative.

The definition of a co-operative as established in the 1995 Co-operative Principles has been included in a number of policy documents including the United Nations Guidelines, the International Labour Organisation's Recommendation 193 on the Promotion of Co-operatives, the European Co-operative Statute and a number of national laws.

The Statement on Co-operative Identity contains a definition, co-operative values and seven Principles.

Definition A co-operative is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise.

Values Co-operatives are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, and solidarity. In the tradition of their founders, co-operative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility, and caring for others.

Principles

- Voluntary and Open Membership
- Democratic Member Control
- Member Economic Participation
- Autonomy and Independence
- Education, Training and Information
- Cooperation Among Cooperatives
- Concern for Community

Financial co-operatives operate under many names throughout the world. In Australia, the most common term is credit union. The international peak body for credit unions is the World Council of Credit Unions or WOCCU. They adopted a similar set of operating principles in 1984.

These nine principles are Open and Voluntary Membership, Democratic Control, Non-Discrimination, Service to Members, Distribution to Members, Building Financial Stability, On-Going Education, Cooperation among Cooperatives and Social Responsibility.

The full text of the ICA statement can be found at Co-operative Resources and Publications Page at www.mercury.org.au and at the ICA site of www.ica.coop. The WOCCU operating principles can be found at www.woccu.org.