

Delegates sort out how to measure up

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Ever wondered how you can be sure you are actually getting 20 litres of petrol, that your can of spaghetti really contains 400g or how pollution is measured?

There is an international committee of delegates from 128 countries for that.

For the first time since its inception in 1955, the International Organisation of Legal Metrology – which makes sure measurements are the same across the world – is meeting in New Zealand this week.

During a conference at SkyCity Convention Centre, 127 delegates representing 66 member and partner countries will discuss all things to do with measurement.

Delegates were welcomed yesterday with a powhiri before responding in waiata and then addressed by new Commerce and Consumer Affairs Minister Paul Goldsmith.

"There is a need for accurate measurement in all facets of life, it's

Science of measurement

What is it?

Metrology is the science of measurement and measuring instruments, and legal metrology is any measurements that are used in legislation or used by governments to count a number of things.

Why is this needed?

Legal metrology protects both the buyer and the seller in a commercial transaction, or where measurements are used to apply a sanction. It has large implications on trade, safety, health and the environment.

What is the International Organisation of Legal Metrology?

The OIML creates a global standard for measuring and measurements. It was formed in Paris in 1955 as part of an intergovernmental treaty, it now includes 32 member countries and 34 with part-membership.

behind so much of what we take for granted and effective legal metrology standards underpin our economy," he said.

The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment's (MBIE) Trading Standards department is responsible for making sure New Zealand's measurements toe the line.

Manager Stephen O'Brien said the accuracy of measurements and the tools doing the job were vital to all aspects of life, and were especially

critical in business. "One of the main focuses is in the area of trade, we are protecting businesses and ensuring there is a level playing field for business," he said.

"For New Zealand to compete on a level playing field, we are ensuring that it is a fair playing field. If everyone is measuring a fuel dispenser you need what you can call a standard 20 litre measure that you know is accurate and also you need a test procedure that is internationally

recognised and an inspector who knows how to go and physically test it."

Mr O'Brien said there were about 260 accredited testers in New Zealand who used more than 6000 standards to complete about 2000 tests each year – from the contents of packaging, to the accuracy of supermarket scales and medical doses.

He said there was a non-compliance rate of less than 5 per

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cent, which was punishable with warnings, fines and, in extreme cases, prosecution.

New Zealand will be represented at the conference by four MBIE staff, including Mr O'Brien, and two external contractors hired to conduct measurement tests for the Government.

Countries present at the event include Cameroon and Mozambique as well as major trade partners China, United States, Britain and Australia.