

### **Introduction**

**A two year collaborative initiative between St James Ethics Centre (SJEC) and the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) will create a presence of the Global Reporting Initiative on a regional level<sup>1</sup> by establishing a GRI Focal Point in Australia. This Focal Point will be based at SJEC and will work under the overall direction of the GRI Secretariat. A nominated manager at the Centre and at the GRI will form an SJEC - GRI management team to ensure the effective management of the Focal Point's activities at his/her basis at the Centre. The Focal Point will be advised by a multi-stakeholder advisory group of key stakeholders representing different constituencies and regions in Australia.**

### **Background**

The missions of the SJEC and GRI are highly synergistic and enable close collaboration. **St James Ethics Centre's** mission is to encourage and assist individuals and organizations to include the ethical dimension in their daily lives, and thereby help to create a better world. Established in 1989, it is a fully independent not-for-profit organization. In 2007 funding was received for a project from the Australian Federal Government (through Treasury) to expand the number of companies in Australia that are actively engaged in identifying and adopting more responsible business practices (RBP)<sup>2</sup>. This includes the consideration, development and promotion of tools available to enable responsible business practice across all levels of business management. The Centre is uniquely placed within Australia to deliver these goals due to strong international links with key players in corporate responsibility and sustainability, including its trusteeship of the Corporate Responsibility Index (CRI) – an initiative of Business in the Community (UK) and its longstanding partnership with the National Business Leaders Forum on Sustainable Development.

The collaborative initiative between the GRI and the SJEC will serve to strengthen the collective visions of both organizations – increasing the uptake of responsible business practice and making reporting on economic, environmental and social performance by all organizations as routine and comparable as financial reporting.

The GRI accomplishes its vision by continually developing, improving and building capacity around the use of its Sustainability Reporting Framework<sup>3</sup>. GRI consists of a network of thousands of individuals from over 60 countries coming from business, civil society, labour, and professional institutions that govern the organization and create the content of the Reporting Framework through a consensus-

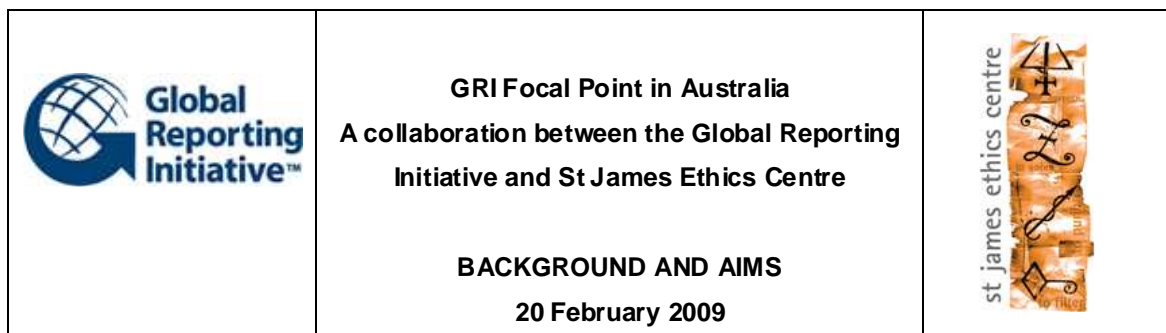
<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this agreement *the region* is understood to refer to Australia, while New Zealand and the Pacific islands could be included if and when GRI stakeholders in these territories confirm their interest in being part of this regional initiative.

<sup>2</sup> The National Responsible Business Practice Project is funded by the Federal Government, through Treasury to enable St James Ethics Centre to engage Australian businesses in identifying and adopting more responsible business practices.

<sup>3</sup> The GRI framework is the most widely used sustainability reporting framework in the world.

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seeking process. This network is open to those who wish to use the Reporting Framework, access information in GRI-based reports, or contribute to the GRI mission in other ways, both formal and informal.

With the support of the Centre, GRI will be able to create a more active and dynamic stakeholder network in Australia and possibly in other neighboring regions<sup>4</sup>. By having a Focal Point in Australia, GRI will be able to respond better to the needs of the Australian network and increase the value for reporting organizations and report users as well as enable greater participation of the regional sustainability reporting network within the global GRI community.



This collaborative program is part of a broader GRI strategy of creating local ownership and use of the global Sustainability Reporting Guidelines. The establishment of an Australian Focal Point is part of an initial experimental phase of this broader strategy. All rights to change the current approach and establishment of the Australian Focal Point remain with the GRI Board of Directors and Secretariat.

### ***Aim of the Focal Point Program***

The Focal Point will help the GRI and St James Ethics Centre achieve **four strategic objectives** for Australia in the following ways.

- **Maintain GRI's position as the leading global standard setting body:** Through the activities of the Focal Point the GRI can engage with the Australian sustainability and CSR community, help shape the sustainability agenda, build relationships with main stream and CSR press, activate and directly connect with Australian players and engage them in the international GRI agenda. It will ensure the regional topics are fed back into the overall GRI strategic technical development and create local ownership of the global standard.
- **Increase value for reporting organizations and report users:** Connect and expand the reporting and academic community for the purposes of best practice sharing, in-kind and financial support, and development of new tools and research (National Annex development and Matchmaker Program). Help involve other important segments in GRI reporting work such as public agencies, small enterprises, supply chain and non-profits.
- **Build and manage a dynamic regional network:** Represent the global GRI on a regional level. Create ownership and engagement within the Australian reporting network, involving the reporters, Organizational Stakeholders and academia. Initiate meetings and events on reporting. Focus relationship building on mainstream

<sup>4</sup> See footnote 1.

	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>GRI Focal Point in Australia</b>  <b>A collaboration between the Global Reporting Initiative and St James Ethics Centre</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>BACKGROUND AND AIMS</b>  <b>20 February 2009</b></p>	
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and ESG/SRI investors, forge alliances with NGOs and build capacity for their participation in the GRI network and as report users, maintain active contacts in the Australian labour community and academic network, explore avenues for reaching out to consumers.

- **Harmonization:**

In association with the Centre's RBP activities work to create harmonization for reporting purposes regionally as an international model of best practice with other CSR initiatives such as the CRI, UN Global Compact and UN Principles of Responsible Investment. Harmonize approaches through, for example, mapping activities, addressing the reporting burden borne by business to encourage greater participation in this agenda, highlighting strengths and synergies of each approach and the GRI's role as *the* international reporting methodology. Increase the uptake of measuring, monitoring and reporting in corporate responsibility and sustainability based on the GRI Guidelines.

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