The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: Learning Lessons from the Fast Track and Building the Global Green Patent Highway

12th Annual Intellectual Property Scholars Conference
Stanford Law School
August 9-10, 2012 – Eric L. Lane
Agenda

- The Green Patent Fast Track Programs
  - Overview
  - Green Patent Fast Track Program Details, Comparative Analysis, and Critiques

- A Proposal for a Harmonized Global Green Patent Highway
Green Patent Fast Track Programs: Overview

- Green patent applications jump the queue in IP offices around the globe:
  - United Kingdom (~ 9 mos)
  - Israel (< 3 mos)
  - Korea (< 1 mo)
  - Australia
  - Canada
  - Japan
  - Brazil
USPTO Green Patent Fast Track - Closed

- Closed February 2012
- 3533 applications processed
- 1062 patents granted
Types of Program Rules

- Eligibility requirements:
  - Subject matter, i.e. eligible green technologies
  - Status, i.e. new/unfiled and/or filed and pending

- Process requirements:
  - Permissible number/type of claims
  - Restriction/election
  - Search requirement?
The Good:  UKIPO, Canada IP Office, IP Australia

Key features: expansive subject matter eligibility rules, deference to applicants, and permanence

• UKIPO Green Channel
  – Open to any applicant who makes a “reasonable assertion” that the invention in the patent application “materially enhances” the environment
  – Gives deference to applicants’ written assertions
  – Applicant can select for acceleration (a) search, (b) examination, (c) combined search and examination, and/or (d) publication

• Canadian Intellectual Property Office

• IP Australia
The Bad: Israel Patent Office and USPTO

Key features: restrictive subject matter eligibility rules, mechanical and/or non-deferential subject matter review, and/or temporary

- IPO enumerated classification requirement:
  - “shoehorning” claims drafting (and perhaps re-drafting)
  - very specific arguments in explanation to fit into a class

- USPTO had classification requirement; then mechanical implementation of subject matter eligibility based only on claim analysis:
  - “shoehorning” claims drafting (and perhaps re-drafting)

- USPTO Pilot Program was temporary:
  - limited enrollment while in operation and now closed
The Ugly: Korea IP Office, Japan Patent Office, and INPI (Brazil)

Key Features: restrictive (and/or absurd) subject matter eligibility rules, protectionist policies, and/or burdensome search requirement

- KIPO: Esoteric enumerated eligibility categories for automatic admission
  - Eighth category eligible only if invention got funding or certification (Korean corp. & local office) from the Korean government
    - Renewable energy technologies (e.g., solar, wind, geothermal, tidal, bioenergy, advanced batteries), carbon reduction technologies, LEDs, green transportation, green cities, reduction of greenhouse gases

- INPI: Limited to “National” applications

- JPO: Prior art search and explanation requirement
Variability and Inefficiency: Collective Critique of All Fast Track Programs

- A disparate patchwork of program requirements
  - Need to research each program
  - Need to prepare different sets of documents

- Variability in subject matter eligibility rules
  - Much work to determine if application is eligible
  - Several different write-ups each tailored for specific program
  - Uncertainty, will it fall into proper classification?

- Variability in process requirements
  - Need to draft several different claim sets
Solution: Build the Global Green Patent Highway

• A harmonized international system for accelerated examination of green patent applications
  – Single standardized set of rules; same submission works everywhere
    • efficient, lower cost for applicants
  – Optimal set of program rules based on experience with individual fast track programs
### Building the Global Green Patent Highway

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<th>Goal:</th>
<th>Recommendation:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Boost participation by green tech applicants (but keep out non-green</td>
<td>Expansive eligibility rules, particularly subject</td>
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<td>technologies, no free riders)</td>
<td>matter eligibility, but some eligibility check or</td>
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<td>Keep it fast / manage office and examiner workload</td>
<td>review</td>
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<td>Reasonable process restrictions for participating</td>
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<td>applications</td>
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Eligibility Rules: Boosting Participation

• Status eligibility:
  – Program should be permanent

• Subject matter eligibility:
  – Expansive
  – Not restricted by enumerated classes

“[B]ecause inventions which have an environmental benefit can arise in any area of technology. For example, we would accept an acceleration request for a manufacturing process which uses less energy, in the same way as we would accept an acceleration request for a wind turbine or a recycling process.”

UKIPO Green Channel Program FAQs
Eligibility Rules: Boosting Participation

Expansive subject matter eligibility boosts filings

• May 21, 2010: USPTO relaxed the subject matter eligibility rule (i.e., dropped technology classification requirement)
  – Number of petitions filed rose 26%
Eligibility Rules: Boosting Participation

Expansive subject matter eligibility boosts acceptance rate

- Number of petitions granted increased by 25 percentage points
Eligibility Rules: Only Beneficial Green Technologies; No Free Riders

- “material environmental benefit” standard
  
  “[T]he materiality standard serves as a policing mechanism to ensure that inventions that have only tangential or speculative effects on the environment cannot avail themselves of special status.”


- Case-by-case review (deferential but no rubber stamp)
  - Review of full submission (not just claims)
  - Review by a small number of trained reviewers (SPEs or equivalent) to maintain uniform standards
Process Rules: Manage Examiner Workload and Keep it Fast

- Reasonable Process Restrictions
  - Limit on number of claims (12, 15, maybe 20)
  - Limit on independents (2, maybe 3)
  - Limited to single invention
Welcome to the Global Green Patent Highway

Global Green Patent Highway Rules

• The applicant submits a written request containing a reasonable assertion that invention confers a material environmental benefit

• The application contains no more than 2 independent claims, no more than 15 total claims, and no multiple dependent claims

• The application claims a single invention (telephonic election required if not)

• The application is newly-filed with the written request or is pending but has not yet received a first Office Action
Welcome to the Global Green Patent Highway

Global Green Patent Highway Rules (continued)

• Submissions are reviewed on a case-by-case basis by a small number of trained Supervisory Patent Examiners

• Issuance of a first Office Action will vary by jurisdiction but will not exceed three months from the filing date of the initial submission

• The same submission (written request and conforming application) can be filed in each participating national intellectual property office

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