

2 December 2003

Dear Eclipse Stewards,

As members of the Free Software community, we have been following the amazing technical achievements that the Eclipse community has made through its open source project. The Eclipse project has created a community which has a large amount of flexibility and control over their software technology, and we want to compliment the Eclipse project on this achievement.

One of the objectives of the Free Software community is to be able to build a completely free system with no dependency on non-Free Software. Any non-Free Software dependency in the underlying technical framework (compilers, libraries and runtime environments) does limit our freedom and the freedom of users to be in control of the platform.

We are glad to have multiple free frameworks in place now, thanks to the huge amount of work done by an dedicated group of people. We regard Eclipse as a major body of working, useful, and non-trivial code that we would like to see running on a completely free operating platform. Past Eclipse releases have already helped us a lot to test and verify that our technical approaches were valid. We are currently tracking the Eclipse 3.0 release milestones and we hope that by the time 3.0 is released, in June 2004, our free operating environments are as capable as the current reference platforms that the Eclipse community regularly tests against. This will free Eclipse from having to depend on any underlying non-free technology.

We think that offering to our respective communities the Eclipse IDE completely exempt from any non-Free Software dependency is only a first step. Now that we are completing the work on a free technical infrastructure to support Eclipse and its software libraries, people are already trying to combine parts of the Eclipse technical infrastructure with traditional Free Software programs and libraries. A problem that people very often encounter though, when doing this, is that the Eclipse software infrastructure is distributed under licenses which are not compatible with the GNU General Public License (GPL).

The GNU project and the larger Free Software movement has tried to make sure that the core infrastructure of GNU/Linux can be distributed under GPL-compatible license terms. The kernel, compiler, core libraries and almost all of the higher-level infrastructure are distributed under the GPL or GPL-compatible licenses. This allows people to create programs based in whole or in part on this existing infrastructure and other Free Software programs, and to distribute them under the GPL. The GPL is one of the most important instruments for keeping software free. It offers a way to create equal rights for all people involved to build upon the platform. Just like the CPL creates an ecosystem of royalty-free technology for all partners.

We think that there would be a very practical benefit for distributing Eclipse under a GPL-compatible license. As appendix to this letter, you will find an article, published by David A. Wheeler, which shows that there is a lot of free software distributed under the GPL (between 50% and 80%). A recent inquiry by one of the Kaffe developers on Freshmeat, focusing solely on programs listed as written in the Java programming language, showed that from the 2424 programs listed, 1051 were distributed under the GPL and 375 under the GNU Lesser General Public License (LGPL), a GPL-compatible license.

GPL-incompatible software licenses tend to create a pool of software that has to stand on its own and that is difficult, and sometimes impossible, to integrate with GPL-compatible projects. As the article in the appendix points out, this is the reason that motivated other projects that wanted to be part of a bigger GPL-compatible Free Software world to change their license. Projects like Python, Mozilla, Zope and Qt/KDE have all switched from GPL-incompatible licenses to the GPL, to a GPL-compatible license, or to dual licensing with the GPL.

For all the above reasons we ask the Eclipse board to investigate the possibility of:

- having at least one Target Operating Environment based on an entirely Free Software Reference Platform, and/or
- allowing the Project Review Committee to approve new official Eclipse (sub)projects (or Academic projects) to use the GPL, a GPL-compatible license (like the LGPL, MIT/X or modern-BSD) or use a dual-license (with one of those licenses), and/or
- allowing the Program Management Committees to distribute new versions of existing Eclipse (sub)projects under one of the licenses mentioned above (or to distribute them under a dual license with one of those licenses), and/or
- creating a new, GPL-compatible version of the Common Public License (CPL) under which most of Eclipse is distributed, by resolving the issues preventing GPL-compatibility in the current version of the CPL.

The last option would probably take much effort of the Eclipse legal team, but has the extra advantage of creating a version of the CPL that is also usable for other projects (outside Eclipse) that want to use a GPL-compatible license, in the future.

The Free Software Foundation (FSF) is offering to provide assistance to the Eclipse legal committee, if needed, to help with the above options.

We hope that the above actions will ease and intensify the cooperation between the various Free Software projects and the Eclipse project, which we think is beneficial and helps to grow both communities.

Sincerely,

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Per Bothner  
GCJ inventor  
GCC Steering Committee founding member

Jeroen Frijters  
IKVM Maintainer

Brian Jones  
GNU Classpath co-founder

## **Appendix:**

"Make Your Open Source Software GPL-Compatible. Or Else."  
by David A. Wheeler  
Revised November 10, 2003  
<<http://www.dwheeler.com/essays/gpl-compatible.html>>