



Oceania
Customs Organisation

Communiqué

The Cook Islands Customs Administration hosted the 5th Annual Conference of Customs Heads of the Oceania Customs Organisation (OCO) from 7-11 April 2003. Mr Geoff Stoddart, the Treasurer of Cook Islands Customs, chaired the meeting.

This Conference was attended by twenty of the twenty-three member administrations. There were thirty delegates from Australia, the Cook Islands, the Fiji Islands, French Polynesia, Guam, Kiribati, the Republic of Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Norfolk Island, Republic of Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, the Kingdom of Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and Wallis & Futuna.

Two staff from the OCO Secretariat attended the Conference along with 11 representatives of the ten invited observer organisations, being the Australian Federal Police (AFP), the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, the Pacific Immigration Directors Conference (PIDC), the Pacific Plant Protection Organisation (PPPO), the South Pacific Chiefs of Police Conference (SPCPC), the US Customs Service (USCS), the Pacific Financial Technical Assistance Centre (PFTAC) and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the World Customs Organization (WCO). An observer from Digerati, a commercial entity, also attended to make a presentation.

The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Customs the Hon. Dr Terepai Maoate formally opened the conference and welcomed the delegates and observers to the Cook Islands and to the Conference, noting the important work of customs administrations in the region. He also noted that this was the return of the conference that was first held in Rarotonga in 1986 as the then CHARM Group.

Delegates and observers at the Conference noted with appreciation the work of Former Head of Secretariat, John Marks and his staff at the Brisbane OCO Secretariat for their work over the past three years, and wished the new Head of Secretariat, Mr Marc Jannier and OCO Secretariat in New Caledonia all the best for the next three years.

The key issues discussed and progressed by the Conference included:

1. Trade Facilitation / Revenue Collection

Member countries were strongly encouraged to support the formation of National Trade Facilitation Committees and to promote support for the regional trade agreements of PICTA and PACER. The Conference particularly recognised the contribution the work of the OCO will make to the outcomes from the Regional Trade Facilitation Program meeting to be held in Fiji on 14 – 16 April.

OCO members reaffirmed support for the regional implementation of international trade instruments such as the WTO Valuation Agreement, the Harmonized System for the classification of goods and for rules of origin. Members noted the value of the World Customs Organization (WCO) convention on the simplification and harmonisation of customs procedures (the revised Kyoto Convention) as providing a fundamental basis for modern customs administrations.

On regional customs automation, members bidding for funds under the European Union's EDF noted with disappointment the lack of indicative support for funding to be provided under the EDF financing facility but were encouraged by UNCTAD's initiative to seek alternative funding sources for the 2nd phase of the ASYCUDA implementation for the Pacific. Members were further

encouraged by ongoing support for the existing ASYCUDA++ user countries Fiji Islands, Samoa and Vanuatu through the operation of the ASYCUDA Support Mechanism for the Pacific (ASMP). Conference members noted the introduction of a revised version of PCTrade in the Federated States of Micronesia. Delegates noted good progress of the implementation of PCTrade in FSM over a period of six months.

2. Law Enforcement

The increased security threats posed to the OCO region from transnational criminal activities were highlighted throughout the Conference by several delegates and invited observers. Issues discussed included drug trafficking (emerging high risk areas included increasing regional cannabis problems, illicit drug storage and transit issues and the ability of island states to control the use of chemical pre-cursors), firearms, money laundering, the black pearl industry, tobacco smuggling, and regional issues from people smuggling, trafficking and illegal migration.

The Conference noted that an assessment will be made on the regional implications of trade security initiatives to highlight the impact of security threats on regional customs administration.

The Conference agreed to pay particular attention to money laundering and the trade in precursor chemicals by undertaking regional assessments through the identification of current controls and vulnerabilities.

The Conference acknowledged the role the OCO has played in the development of model legislation for use in the region for weapons control, illicit drug control and the need to comment on the draft legal provisions relating to UN resolution 1373 and the Convention on Transnational Organised Crime and its protocols together with the 12 UN Conventions.

OCO members agreed communication between law enforcement agencies is vital to the efficient implementation of customs law enforcement in the region. OCO members agreed to intensify their contribution to information held on regional databases and communication networks. This included ongoing support for the implementation of CAPERS (Customs Asia Pacific Enforcement Reporting System) by OCO members, the supply of information to CRIN (the Customs Regional Intelligence Network) and to explore linkages with other enforcement networks such as the South Pacific Law Enforcement Extranet (SPLEXNET). The Conference took note of the development of a vessel reporting mechanism for OCO members.

3. Modernisation and capacity building

The Conference noted that the key outcomes from customs were in the areas of facilitation and customs control, but their successful administration is substantially dependent on the way customs is administered. Regional capacity building for human resources in customs is a key task for OCO administrations.

The conference was briefed on the WCO work underway to develop a strategy for customs capacity building and a blueprint for model administrations. Included in the blueprint will be a diagnostic tool to facilitate customs capacity building. The Conference was reminded of a memorandum of understanding signed between the OCO and WCO for increased cooperation between the two bodies.

The OCO Secretariat reported on a joint initiative undertaken by the Secretariat and UNCTAD to formulate draft set of technical assistance coordination guidelines for technical assistance projects in the region. Members acknowledged the work of UNCTAD in the formulation of the draft guidelines and that, following further refinement, would be posted on the OCO website by June 2003.

The conference congratulated the work of the OCO's Integrity Committee that was tasked with assisting members implement methods to improve the integrity of border officials. This included the application of self assessment tools and integrity action plans. The importance of the use of these integrity tools, including by other bodies like the PIDC, was recognised particularly in light of international attention such as from Global Forum III on Safeguarding Integrity and Fighting Corruption and the APEC Secure trade in the APEC Region (STAR) statement.

The Conference recognised that the international efforts by OCO and other bodies such as the WCO, UNCTAD, Forum Secretariat, the Pacific Immigration Directors Conference (PIDC) and the South Pacific Chiefs of Police Conference (SPCPC) are complementary. The OCO supported efforts to ensure the work of all the bodies is mutually supportive and without duplication.

4. Communication / Representation

The Head of Secretariat addressed the OCO's work in promoting the achievements of the OCO and its members since the last Conference. He highlighted the steps being undertaken to ensure effective communication to conference members of the work of the OCO Secretariat in discharging its assigned tasks and in ensuring all members are fully briefed on the outcomes of this activity. Ongoing support for OCO publications and website was reiterated.

The Conference agreed to re-examine its strategic planning process to develop its plan to give clear strategic direction to OCO work and as a communications vehicle to encourage support for OCO goals by member governments and other organisations.

Members of the Conference expressed their strong confidence in the move of the OCO Secretariat from Brisbane to Noumea and recognised the changes had been achieved seamlessly. Members are confident that they will continue to be effectively serviced by the new Secretariat arrangements.

5. OCO Strategic Plan and Annual Work Plan

Members agreed to an updated OCO strategic plan and work plan for 2003 – 2005 to reflect the outcomes of the Conference and implement the agreed activities to be undertaken to strengthen customs activity in the region.

6. Closing

The Conference accepted the offer of the Papua New Guinea to host the OCO Annual Conference in 2004.

Delegates expressed their gratitude to the people of the Cook Islands and the staff of Cook Islands Customs, who had all been instrumental in making this a most successful and enjoyable Conference.

Cook Islands
11 April 2003