



20th OCO ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2018

COMMUNIQUE

1. The 20th Annual Conference of the Oceania Customs Organisation (OCO) was hosted in Melbourne, Australia from 11 – 14 June 2018 and was attended by Heads of Customs Administrations of the Governments of American Samoa, Australia, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. Apologies were received from French Polynesia, Guam, Niue, Samoa, Timor Leste, and Wallis and Futuna.

2. In attendance were invited representatives from the Asia Pacific Group on Money Laundering (APG), Her Majesty's Customs and Excise, United Kingdom, IMF Pacific Financial and Technical Assistance Center (PFTAC), Japan Ministry of Finance, Joint Interagency Task Force (JIATF) West, New Zealand Police, New Zealand Statistics, Pacific Islands Tax Administrators Association (PITAA), Pacific Immigration Directors' Conference (PIDC), Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police (PICP), Pacific Transnational Crime Coordination Centre (PTCCC), Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), United States Coast Guard – District 14 (USCG), United States Secret Service, United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), WCO Regional Office for Capacity Building (ROCB), World Bank Group, and the World Customs Organisation (WCO).

3. The Conference and Customs Heads acknowledged the indigenous Australian custodians of the land, the Wurundjeri people.

4. The Conference was officially opened by the Commissioner of Australian Border Force (ABF), Mr. Michael Outram (APM). Commissioner Outram in his opening statement outlined Australia's commitment to engage with the Pacific with greater intensity to provide more substantial long-term investment and continued development. Commissioner Outram also provided the Conference with Australia's key strategic goals and regional collaboration roles in the Pacific.

5. The Secretary General of the WCO, Dr. Kunio Mikuriya also addressed the Conference highlighting the WCO's key priorities and their implication for small island economies. He also stressed the importance of connecting the dots in the maritime environment by applying WCO instruments. Dr Mikuriya expressed sincere gratitude to the Government of Australia, ABF, the Department of Home Affairs and the OCO Secretariat for the excellent arrangements in hosting the 2018 Annual Conference.

6. The Conference witnessed three milestone event summarised as follows:

a) Official signing ceremony of the Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in Customs Matters between OCO Members

Fifteen of the OCO members signed the MOU on Customs Cooperation aimed at facilitating the exchange of information under relevant border security powers of individual member states.

b) Accession of Kiribati to the Revised Kyoto Convention

Kiribati's Minister of Justice, Hon Natan Teewe representing his Government, deposited Kiribati's instrument of accession to the International Convention on the Simplification and Harmonization of Customs Procedures (Revised Kyoto Convention - RKC). With this, Kiribati becomes 114th Contracting Party the very first non-WCO Member to accede to the Convention.

c) Official launch of the Pacific Harmonised Commodity Description and Coding System (PACHS) 2017

The OCO launched the PACHS 17 a multipurpose goods nomenclature that forms the basis for Customs Tariffs and International Merchandise Trade Statistics has enabled all OCO members that are at different levels of implementing HS17 adopt a common benchmark and better reflect goods exported and imported by the Pacific region using a standardized system of names and codes.

7. The Conference welcomed the presentations provided by Member administrations and partner organisations on enhancing the role of Customs in regional integration and trade facilitation, strengthening cooperation and information exchange on law enforcement matters, development of technical and professional capability of Customs in the Pacific, and strategies for the reform of Customs administrations.

Members were particularly grateful to CNMI, PNG, Kiribati and Vanuatu for presentations on progress with their respective Customs Reforms agendas.

8. Members welcomed the good progress and achievements made by the OCO Secretariat for the period from July 2017 to May 2018 reflected in OCO Interim Annual Report. The members requested that any significant changes made to the interim report be circulated to members for endorsement.

9. Members considered the OCO Long-term Sustainable Funding Strategy and recommended further consideration of the revised membership structure and a Working Group was appointed to take this forward.

10. Members endorsed the OCO Professional Standards Framework and further endorsed that the cost of implementation would be managed through existing resources of the OCO.

11. Members endorsed the proposed budget and work program for 2018/2019, approved the recruitment of the Customs Systems Analyst position and noted the level of membership arrears.

12. Members noted the current status of the Trade Facilitation in Customs Cooperation project final audit and encouraged the early completion of the audit process.

13. Members endorsed changes to the Constitution of the OCO and Charter of the OCO Steering Committee in relation to the categorisation of membership arrears and level of participation.

14. Members considered the proposed way forward in light of the Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in Customs Matters signed by members on 11 June, 2018. Members acknowledged and commended Australia on the development of the smartphone application initiative for small craft movement and commended New Zealand on the development of the OCO Notebook. Members endorsed the reestablishment of the Information Working Group.

15. Members acknowledged the outcomes of the inaugural Joint-Board meeting between PICP, PIDC and OCO in March 2018, and endorsed OCO signing the Declaration of Partnership between PICP, PIDC and OCO.

16. Members accepted and thanked the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands' (CNMI) for their offer to host the next annual conference in 2019 and also the offer by Cook Islands to host the 2020 Conference.
17. Members expressed their sincere gratitude to Australia for its contribution as Chair of the OCO Annual Conference and Steering Committee in the past year, and welcomed CNMI as the new Chair for the conference for the next year.
18. New Zealand informed members of the NZ Customs and Excise Act 2018 that comes into force 1 October, 2018. They offered to share the Act and a comparison guide with members.
19. Members endorsed the Small Craft Mobile Application Project to progress to Phase 3 from 1 July, 2018 and that Australia will continue development, enhancement and rollout of the application.
20. The Conference was officially closed by Commander James Watson, Regional Director Pacific, Australian Border Force.