



July-September, 2020

Vision: To be recognized as a world class regional Customs Organization that collaborates with regional and global partners to deliver high quality services and sustainable solutions to Member Administrations

OCEANIA CUSTOMS ORGANIZATION NEWSLETTER

FOREWORD



Greetings!

Somehow COVID-19 has made the year seem shorter, we are on to the last quarter of the year. And what a year it has been..

As much as the pandemic has changed our lifestyles, the so called "new normal" for OCO and means added responsibilities at the borders as we strive to make the Pacific Islands largely COVID-19 free or "contained".

Customs officers are now the primary line of defense of every nation to stop

the virus from crossing borders.

However, unlike the beginning of the year when there was so much uncertainty, we have in some way brought some normalcy in our various operations, as we respond to the impacts of the pandemic.

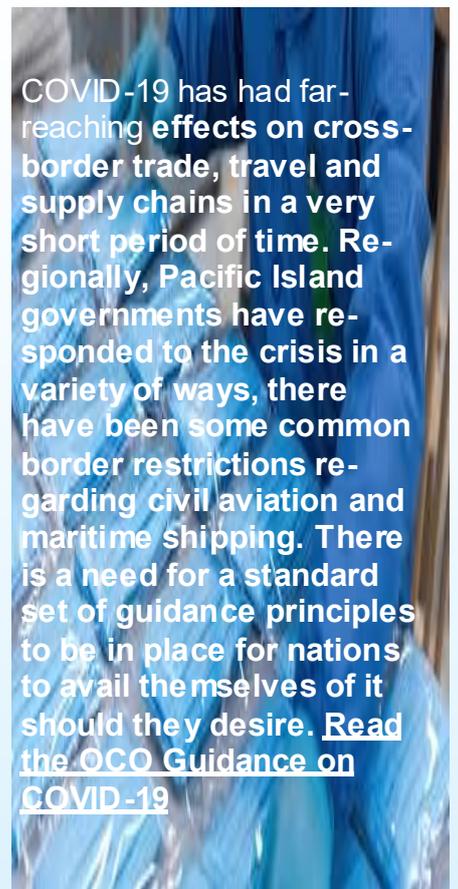
Our forefathers survived and bounced back from the Spanish flu a century ago, we will too. In the Pacific, we have always been resilient.

We need to continue to collaborate, communicate and help each other in this difficult time

Richard Brennan

Head of Secretariat

Covid-19 Note:

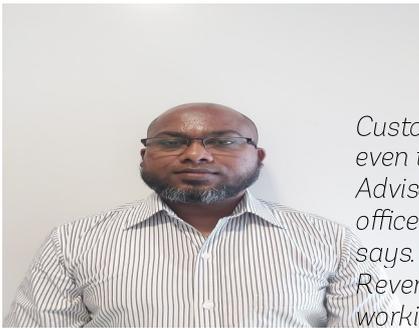


COVID-19 has had far-reaching effects on cross-border trade, travel and supply chains in a very short period of time. Regionally, Pacific Island governments have responded to the crisis in a variety of ways, there have been some common border restrictions regarding civil aviation and maritime shipping. There is a need for a standard set of guidance principles to be in place for nations to avail themselves of it should they desire. [Read the OCO Guidance on COVID-19](#)

OUR MEMBERS



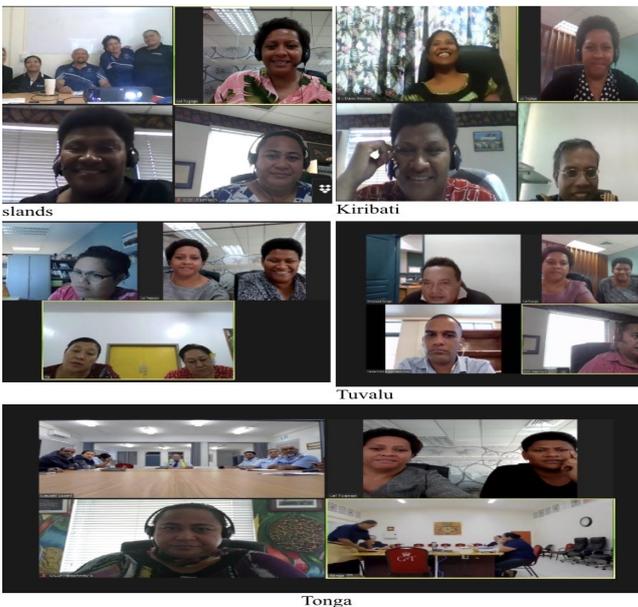
SPOTLIGHT



OCO appoints Enforcement Advisor

Customs officers are often seen as gatekeepers and not as important economic contributors even though they help in facilitating trade in an economy, newly appointed OCO Enforcement Advisor, Mohammed Ajaq says. The public fails to recognise the importance of a customs officers' contribution to the well-being of the society and the nation as a whole," Mr Ajaq says. The Fijian national joins OCO with over 21 years of professional experience from the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service, where he initially served as a senior customs officer in 1999 and working up the ranks to the position of manager audit compliance. [Read More](#)

IN THE NEWS



Getting countries PACER Plus Ready:

OCO recently worked with five signatory countries – Kiribati, Samoa, Tonga, Cook Islands and Tuvalu- to draft Guidelines on Customs Procedures and Rules of Origin, intended to improve customs officials and traders' understanding of the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER-Plus) and overall improve trading between the countries.

The guidelines will focus on PACER Plus obligations related to Rules of Origin (ROO) and Customs Procedures as well as COVID-19 measures. [More](#)

The guidelines for each of these countries are now available. For any queries, contact OCO Trade and Revenue Management Adviser, Mrs Laisiana Tugaga on LaisianaT@ocosec.org

Webinar on role of customs

The Indonesian Directorate General of Customs and Excise invited Guusta Visser, Dutch Customs Attaché responsible for Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam, and Joost Nuijten, Deputy Head of the Economic Department, to speak in a webinar on the Dutch way to conduct trade facilitation.

Mr. Rionald Silaban, Head of the Financial and Education Training Agency of the Ministry of Finance, stated in his welcoming remarks that the webinar is part of an International webinar series that will produce a webinar every fortnight. [More](#)



IN THE NEWS

Preparatory works for WCO Master Training Program



Preparatory works have begun for the World Customs Organisation (WCO) Master Training Program (MTP), which is expected to begin mid next year. The program will initially be rolled out to regional World Customs Organisation members. A virtual meeting was held in August with the World Customs Organisation Regional Office of Capacity Building, the Oceania Customs Organisation and customs officers from Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Timor Leste, Tonga and Vanuatu to discuss the training. [Read More](#)

MEMBER NEWS: FIJI STRENGTHENS BORDER SECURITY



The Fiji Revenue and Customs Service (FRCS) has taken another step towards strengthening security at the borders with the launch of the Container Control Programme (CCP) in Fiji at the FRCS Complex in Nasese, Suva.

The United Nations Office on Drug and Crime (UNODC) and World Customs Organization (WCO) Container Control Programme (CCP) will strengthen Fiji's ability to process containers that pass through the nation's ports.

CCP focuses on improving risk management, supply chain security and trade facilitation in sea, land and airports to prevent the cross-border movement of illicit goods.

The CCP has been funded by the Australian Border Force (ABF) as part of its commitment to work together with Pacific nations to strengthen regional borders.

The ABF partnered with UNODC and WCO to implement the CCP and the Cargo Targeting System in Fiji – a system funded by Australia through the Fiji – Australia Vuvale Partnership. FRCS Acting Chief Executive Officer Ms Fane W. Vave acknowledged the valuable support and collaboration with the WCO, UNODC and the Australian Government through the ABF in the establishment of the Container Control Programme.

"This is a significant accomplishment for Fiji as we are the first Customs Administration within the Oceania Region to administer the Container Control Programme," Ms. Vave said.

"Fiji is a central hub for sea and air cargo in the Oceania region and has trade links to Australia and New Zealand as well as other countries. The creation of a dedicated risk profiling team to identify potential illicit and non-compliant shipments will mark another step of FRCS to address threats in the region". – FIJI SUN [More](#)

TRAINING: Refresher course on PACER Plus RoO



“The most important aspect of the training is to build and maintain a better knowledge base of PACER Plus Rules of Origin to support of a smooth implementation of the agreement,”- Richard Brennan

Oceania Customs Organisation conducted a refresher training on PACER Plus Rules of Origin for nine Pacific Island customs administrations to prepare them for when the agreement comes into force.

Seven countries have ratified PACER Plus, which will come into effect 60 days after the eighth country has committed to fulfilling the obligations of the trade agreement.

The month-long training, which started on September 21 is based on a blended training format facilitated in partnership with the Charles Sturt University's Centre for Customs and Excise Studies (CCES).

“The signatory countries need to continue preparing themselves for when PACER Plus comes into force,” says OCO Head of Secretariat, Richard Brennan. “The successful implementation of trading activities under the agreement and the accompanying economic benefits rests in part on the preparedness of customs administrations to facilitate trade. The partnership with CCES and the change in modality to online learning is very critical given the limitations of providing face-to-face training brought about by Covid-19 pandemic.”

Customs administrations determine duties or impose restrictions on products depending on its country of origin. The criteria of determining the source of goods or the Rules of Origin are therefore important legal instruments for the application of preferential trade agreements. “The correct and accurate application of the Rules of Origin is required to provide both accurate trade statistics and to ensure the proper application of regional trade agreements,” OCO Trade and Management Adviser, Laisiana Tugaga said. “Customs administrations of parties who have ratified PACER Plus must ensure that they and all their stakeholders are fully aware of their roles and procedures stipulated under the agreement.”

The 22 officers from Cook Islands, Kiribati, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Tonga, Niue, Nauru, Samoa, Solomon Islands who are participants of the training will receive updated technical information on PACER Plus Rules of Origin and its application. Nine of the current participants were trained and accredited under the PACER Plus ROO Train the Trainers Program in 2018, which was also facilitated by CCES. This capacity building activity is supported by Australia and New Zealand under the PACER Plus Readiness Package.

“The most important aspect of the training is to build and maintain a better knowledge base of PACER Plus Rules of Origin to support of a smooth implementation of the agreement,” Mr. Brennan said. “In ensuring a sustainable approach to our capacity building efforts, the officers in this training will able to deliver the training on Rules of Origin in their own countries.”

“The correct and accurate application of the Rules of Origin is required to provide both accurate trade statistics and to ensure the proper application of regional trade agreements,”- OCO Trade and Management Adviser, Laisiana Tugaga.

OPINION: Role of Customs during and post COVID-19



The economic crisis caused by COVID-19 will continue longer than the health crisis. The continuation of trade is important for all economies- nations still need to have imports and exports moving across borders during this pandemic. Customs agencies, therefore, play a key role in ensuring that national health task force regulations are implemented and conducted in accordance with safe handling procedures.

Customs work during COVID-19

The challenge customs officers face today is multifaceted. Customs officers must continue to facilitate trade under restrictive quarantine measures designed to ensure nations are COVID-19 free. This includes boarding of vessels under strict health guidelines to enable cargo movement and the safe handling of cargoes and vessels to keep boarding parties and cargo handlers safe. OCO has provided guidance to customs administrations on managing cargo and people movement, which are linked to the Pacific Humanitarian pathway, so that medical supplies and health workers can continue to be sent where they are needed in response to the pandemic. Customs agencies also play a key role in a nation's security. When that security is threatened by a contagion, customs will follow the advice of the health agency on how it manages both people and cargo movements including postal packets.

In the Pacific, nations have implemented quarantine measures that are designed to keep vessels entering a nation in quarantine for a designated period to ensure it is COVID-19 free, and that cargo is managed in accordance with the national health principles. Customs agencies are working together to enable the facilitation of trade and returning nationals to be conducted in a safe manner with much of the Pacific remaining COVID-19 free.

Customs role in the "new normal"

While some Pacific Island countries are still COVID-19 free, the role of customs will be important when borders do re-open. Customs officers will be at the front line- inspecting passengers and cargo and allowing movement of vessels and aircraft as they would normally do pre-COVID-19. However, in this context of a "post pandemic" environment there will be the added aspect of facilitating cross border movement in a safe "COVID-19 normal" manner to ensure nations remain free of the virus as much as possible.

Customs agencies will need to work with other border agencies including Immigration and Health departments to facilitate this movement. As nations, either individually or regionally, decide to free up current restrictions, national customs services will simply adopt the national governments policies and follow suit.

OCO believes there will be continued health checks for arriving passengers for some time until a vaccine has been made available widely throughout the region and that the "new normal" whatever that will be, will be something customs agencies simply have to adapt to in the medium term along with the rest of society.

OCO in the "new normal"

Like many organisations, OCO has implemented a few actions to protect its staff from the virus and at the same time continue to meet the needs of its 23 members during this pandemic.

The secretariat assisted the Pacific Islands Forum Regional Security Task force in formulating a regional response towards the Pacific Humanitarian Pathway and shared best practice examples from members in the region.

We have changed our operation model from face to face workshops into electronic modality using Zoom to deliver webinars or training for members and working with partners such as the Centre for Customs and Excise Studies in Canberra, Australia.

OCO also continues to support the Pacer Plus implementation through a suit of training activities and legislative reforms for parties. We have also discussed capacity building initiatives with the World Customs Organization. The annual OCO Heads of Customs meeting, which was supposed to be held in Cook Islands, will now be held online.

While COVID-19 has changed the way we do things, in this "new normal" the role of customs agencies has become more important than ever. We must continue to work together to fight this virus, to fight criminals and to earn revenue for our nations. **-By Richard Brennan**

Call to members



Share your media announcement or press release with us by emailing info@ocosec.org or mediaOCO@ocosec.org

We would like to share this on the OCO website www.ocosec.org as well as on our social media channels.



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Oceania Customs
Organization



Private Mail Bag,
84 Harris Rd,
Suva,
Fiji Islands

Phone: (679) 331 3110
E-mail: info@ocosec.org

www.ocosec.org