



**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



My role really did change when the pandemic broke as it drew my desk into regional matters more than ever before. Working on the Pacific Humanitarian

Pathway protocols with the Regional Security Technical Working group in the Pacific Forum was challenging as it was about allowing cargo to move freely in an otherwise restricted regime due to the pandemic, that required a balance to recognize national sovereignty which I was able to find for the Customs and Biosecurity protocols. Working of the Pacific Vaccination passport to reopen the Pacific was perhaps the most challenging as I did not realise the complexity of that when I first became engaged with it back in November last year. I think the work Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) have done on that is simply amazing and a credit to those involved.

However, from a purely OCO perspective, I think the transformation of the Organisation from a workshop delivery focus, into an online accredited training modality was perhaps the greatest highlight as it has set up the Organisation for the future to deliver on what sits at the heart of its

charter, essentially to deliver core Customs training at a national level in sufficient quantity and quality to build sustainable knowledge bases inside those Customs services.

I wanted the OCO to be more involved in regional security whilst developing national needs. I had three things I wanted to bring in, one was the small craft app which had been in development for several years, that was nice to see it arrive in my time, and we have rolled out its functionality across several nations but still need more to pick it up and use it. We are seeing some great results from it, and I believe it has a role to play in outer island coast watch initiatives, self-clearance reporting for yachts, and possibly extend to a regional small craft tracking capability in future iterations should the members decide to go there.

I also wanted the HS Tariff system to extend into nations that previously did not have that, and the PACER Plus readiness project certainly delivered on that. The other main vision I had was the delivery of ASYCUDA widespread across the Pacific as that would close most of the WCO and WTO gaps the OCO has been trying to close since its inception. At the time of my departure the committee is deliberating on accepting the agreement with UNCTAD to allow the OCO to deliver work under the PRISE – IMPACT EDF 11 agreement-

*(cont'd)*

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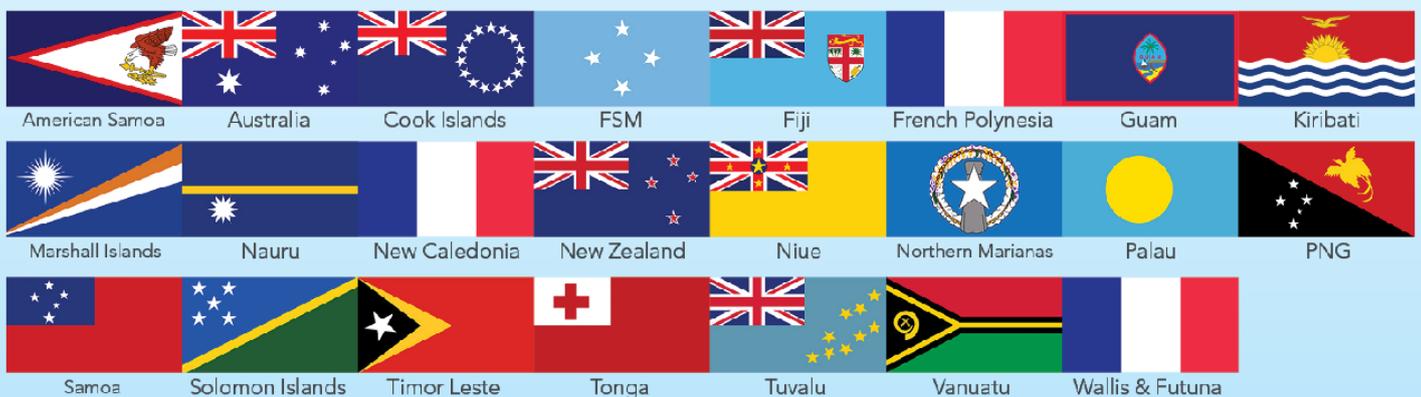
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## OUR MEMBERS



During the pandemic there were several instances of Customs being relegated from front line spaces as the response taskforces took over the border, in the early days and this resulted in cargo not being discharged or left on wharfs for eighteen days under a misguided belief you could catch COVID-19 off a shipping container. The challenge for Customs in the Pacific was to remain responsive to the border functions they were charged with during the pandemic. Having enough staff to clear vessels and aircraft when there was a positive contact requires some flexibility in rostering and most nations seemed to develop workable solutions to counter the impacts caused by the pandemic. The challenge for the Secretariat was to consider the best practice approaches from the region and communicate that across the membership which we did.

I feel the time has now come to disband or wind back those taskforces and learn to live with COVID-19 as a normal respiratory virus given the high number of vaccination rates across the Pacific. Some smaller nations are only now just seeing the virus enter their shores and feeling that impact; what is clear is that its arrival is inevitable, the virus will come into all our nations, we simply need to learn live with it and get economies moving again whilst ensuring the medical assistance is adequate. The borders are reopening, and all agencies will need to work in a coordinated manner to provide security to its citizens.

I think it is important to keep the voice of the Pacific being heard in the OCO membership, and in particular the steering committee. There are three permanent members, two of which are the main financial donors which tend to dominate the conversations and directions.

Small island nations also need to be part of discussions and decisions if we are to continue to grow and develop our collective capabilities and I encourage all members to play active roles in within the OCO steering committee.

It is also important that all members actively engage with the OCO secretariat to ensure that they are leveraging the benefits of OCO membership in order to enhance their own organisation's effectiveness.

Sharing information is key to targeting the risks more efficiently, we have started that communication channel by linking up national contact points, we need to do more in the shared border aspects of multi-agency approaches, learn to work together better through exercise like the multi-agency multinational desk top exercise we ran in

2021. We must develop the connections between people and ensure they have the right training and resources including technology, to do their work. The All-Partners Access Network (APAN) system is designed to share information between Customs administrations and is a secure network administered by the USA Joint Task Force West in Hawaii. When I started it had 7 members with two rooms and 23 documents in the system, it now has 786 members, 46 rooms, 715 documents, and 8617 site visits. The information flow is occurring very well and is at a sustainable level.

The small craft app has potential for use as a self-assessed pre-arrival clearance tool, it can also be used in the outer islands in the hands of the village chief for remote reporting back to national contact points. Consideration must be given to using it as a live tracking tool to record small craft movement in real time like Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) does with the foreign fishing vessels, but this will require the technology and the funding to be identified, placing the data from tracking small craft across the data FFA holds will lead to significant hot spot identification which allows for enforcement activity that may extend to high seas activity using multi agency approaches in manning patrol boats. The future is simply limited to your imagination, economics and political will.

We have partnerships with the Pacific Island Chiefs of Police (PICP), and Pacific Island Immigration Development Community (PIDC), we sit in the PIFS regional security task force, and we talk with FFA and Pacific Transnational Crime Coordination Center (PTCCC), they need to come into the partnership. We also need to develop better working relationships with the private sector who have a role to play in security of the supply chain, so it's imperative to keep all those lines of communication and cooperation open and active so everyone works together to improve the lives of Pacific Islanders, after all, isn't that what the BOE declaration says we should be doing?

Watching the members partake in the core Customs training and graduate from it. We used to have 15 people come to a workshop, but now we reach on average eighty people online, we are achieving in a far better way than ever before, what the OCO charter asks of us.

Developing the staff of the OCO Secretariat has also been delightful, I did this by empowering them I saw each one of them develop and they delivered on their work activities with ease, I think that's a standout item.

Working with the law enforcement partners the PICP and the PIDC, has been nothing short of brilliant and very funny at times thanks to the relationships we have at a personal level; we all see the same issues and generate solutions and that can only be a great thing for the future. But what I will walk away with is the knowledge that the long-awaited information flows between Customs agencies is crystalizing into more frequent occurrence of business as usual. Our Small Craft App has demonstrated this is working well. The use of the PTCCC in Samoa is key to tackling transnational organised crime in the Pacific and I feel that agency will have a critical role to play moving forward as they are the eyes of the Pacific that will see the transnational aspects before anyone else. They need to be drawn in from the margins of discussions on transnational crime and come closer to the center as they know the modus operandi in real time, what they can bring to the discussions is vital and working with them has been a highlight.

I have been working in the Pacific for over fifteen years in small, medium and large Customs administrations, and have had great success in every placement I have worked in. I was able to abate leakage in the Solomon Islands which improved revenue collection by \$320M in two years. In Tonga I worked with the team to set up automated lane assignments for the Red, Yellow, and Green lanes, a concept they recognized within five minutes of starting the training and watched as they took over and mapped out their entire trading base in one afternoon, that was an amazing experience. In Kiribati, I introduced enforcement activity into their function and in Nauru I set up a modern Customs agency from the ground up, something that I will always reflect on as a great opportunity and wonderful experience, taking twenty-eight citizens and turning them into Customs officers. In the OCO I have changed the Organisation to deliver accredited Customs courses online and from that establish knowledge centers at national levels whilst working to improve regional security. I can look back and smile!

It has been a long road but it's time to go home and do some gardening, camping and fishing, but I am open to fielding offers!

Thank You.  
Richard Brennan.

***Disclaimer – The opinions expressed within this content are solely the author's and do not necessarily reflect the opinions and beliefs of the Oceania Customs Organisation or its members***

# Apr - Jun Activity Highlights

## OCO Members Beef Up Border Re-Opening Preparation



As Pacific Island nations announce their easing of travel restrictions and opening of borders, Customs agencies are preparing for the increase in visitors, which also brings risks of transnational crimes to our shores.

This month, the Australian Border Force and the OCO Secretariat worked with Customs agencies to refresh officers with the latest updates in the mobile app- the OCO Pacific Small Craft App (OPSCA). [Read More](#)

## OCO Secretariat visits US on a Study Tour



The United States Patent and Trademark Organization invited members of the OCO Secretariat to visit the United States of America (USPTO) on a study tour.

OCO Head of Secretariat Mr. Richard Brennan and an OCO team consisting of Ms. Irma Daphney Stone- Operations Manager, Mr. Mohammed Ajaz – Customs Enforcement Advisor, Ms. Tokanuea Karakaua –Project Research Assistant and Mr. Etison Sadang – Palau Customs recently toured the United States on an invitation from the USPTO from April 30 to May 4 to explore firsthand and learn about the detection of counterfeit goods. [Read More](#)

## Maritime Border Security Top on OCO Agenda



Maritime border security is top on the agenda of customs agencies in the Pacific as threats of transnational organised crime activities, human trafficking, money laundering and white-collar crimes, illicit drug trafficking and smuggling, COVID-19, climate change, illegal fishing increase.

The Australian Border Force has been helping the Oceania Customs Organisation and its members equip themselves for these threats, and this include the training of officers to understand latest trends. [Read More](#)

## The WCO Asia/Pacific Sub-Regional Data Analytics Hybrid Workshop for Pacific Islands

A hybrid workshop on Data Analytics for Pacific Islands was hosted by the ROCB A/P in close cooperation with the WCO and OCO under the sponsorship of the Korea Customs Cooperation Fund (CCF/Korea). [Read More.](#)

## Customs and Tax Administrations Strengthen



Improving tax compliance in Pacific Island nations is one of the measures Tax and Customs administrations in the region are taking, to improve revenue collections which have been hugely impacted by the slow economic activities caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Our members are at various stages of economic recovery, however, revenue collection from Tax and Customs administrations is still critical to fund the various arms of government machineries,” Oceania Customs Organisation (OCO) Head of Secretariat Richard Brennan said. [Read More](#)



Customs administrations in the region are noticing a rise in the purchase of common counterfeit commodities and medications, mostly prevalent in commercial and e-commerce trade, and which have social and economic impacts on communities and governments.

“The trade of counterfeit items is quickly becoming a problem for us in the Pacific,” **Acting Head of Secretariat, Irma Daphney Stone** said. “Today, it’s getting harder and harder to notice counterfeits as the makers are also getting smarter and making the goods look as genuine as possible. When we opt for fake items, we are opting for sub-standard goods, which generally are cheaper, but which could pose serious side effects in the case of medicines.”

[Read More](#)

## MEMBERS NEWS

**CNMI Customs seizes 4.04 lbs. of meth.** [Read full story here.](#)

**RMIT Recognizes Authors from FRCS.** [Read full story here.](#)

## OCO SECRETARIAT NEWS

### OCO appoints new Finance and Program Assistant



Oceania Customs Organisation (OCO) has appointed Ms. Ashnita Singh as the new Finance & Program Assistant.

Ms. Singh comes with professional and industry experience and her last employer was the Biosecurity Authority of Fiji where she spent five years.

Ashnita was born in Labasa, Fiji where she attained her primary and secondary school education and later moved to Suva for her tertiary studies in the field of Accounting and Economics. She currently holds a Bachelors degree from the University of the South Pacific and is currently pursuing her Post Grad Diploma in Professional Accounting.

Her personal objectives include; continuous self development through hands on experiences, as well as furthering her study and acquiring effective leadership and communication skills.

Ms. Singh will be based at the OCO Secretariat in Suva under the Corporate Services Division.

# UPCOMINGEVENTS

July  
2022

ICP Meeting	13 July
Advance Ruling Dialogue	14 July
Guam Modernization Project <i>(tentative)</i>	18 July
ISWG	19 July
Tariff CERT IV	11 Jul - 29 Aug
OPSCA Training	27 July
Enforcement and Compliance CERTIII	25 July - 12 Sept

August  
2022

Regional Law Enforcement Conference	1 - 4 Aug
Valuation CERT IV	8 Aug - 26 Sept
IPR Legislative Training	16 - 17 Aug
Tariff CERTIII	22 Aug - 10 Oct

September  
2022

OCO Conference <i>(tentative)</i>	6 Sep
IPR Enforcement Training <i>(tentative)</i>	
Regional Workshop on TRS	12 - 16 Sep
Launching of PACCOMTRADE DataBase Project <i>(tentative)</i>	14 Sept
CERT IV Electives	19 Sept - Nov
CERT III Valuation	19 Sept - 7 Nov
Customs Brokers Training	20 Sept
OPSCA Training <i>(tentative)</i>	26 - 28 Sept

# GALLERY



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