



WORLD CUSTOMS ORGANIZATION OVERVIEW

The World Customs Organization (WCO), established in 1952 as the Customs Co-operation Council (CCC), is an independent intergovernmental body whose mission is to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of Customs administrations.

Today, the WCO represents 185 Customs administrations across the globe at all stages of social and economic development that collectively process approximately 98% of world trade. As the global centre of Customs expertise, the WCO is the only international organization with competence in Customs matters and can rightly call itself the voice of the international Customs community. The WCO provides an ideal forum for Customs administrations and their stakeholders to hold in-depth discussions, exchange experiences, and share best practices on a range of international Customs and trade issues.

The WCO's work can be categorized into five main areas: setting standards for a number of diverse but interlinked Customs procedures; promoting international cooperation including information exchange; managing risk; building sustainable capacity including the delivery of quality technical assistance through Customs officials; and enhancing the image of Customs as a core function of a state service by emphasizing its contribution to national economic prosperity and social development.

Traditionally, to mark International Customs Day each year, the WCO Secretariat dedicates a theme that is pertinent to the challenges facing the global Customs community.

International Customs Day 2023, celebrated on 26 January 2023, was honoured under the slogan: "Nurturing the Next Generation: Promoting a Culture of Knowledge-sharing and Professional Pride in Customs". The global Customs community was invited to implement the theme throughout this year and beyond and reflect on how best to support newly recruited officers, facilitate the sharing of knowledge, and heighten the sense of pride in being part of this institution and of the global Customs community.

COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE WCO AND IPPC SECRETARIATS

1. Agreement

There are several matters which are of common interest to the WCO and the IPPC Secretariat to help facilitate the international trade of plants and plant products in a safe and efficient manner. With the aim of promoting cooperation on these matters of common interest pertaining to their respective mandates, and helping implement related decisions by the two respective governing bodies, the FAO, on behalf of the IPPC Secretariat, and the WCO agreed to establish a formal relationship for bilateral collaboration and signed an Agreement at the WCO Headquarters in Brussels on 19 June 2018.

2. Joint Work Plan

Based on the Agreement signed in June 2018, the WCO and IPPC Secretariats agreed on a Joint Work Plan for Cooperation (2019-2022) between the two Organizations on 18 March 2019. The Joint Work Plan consolidated the major activities for bilateral cooperation and explored further areas of joint work between the two Secretariats over the three-year period.

The Joint Work Plan mentioned seven areas of cooperation: (i) joint events, especially in the area of trade facilitation; (ii) communication and advocacy; (iii) cross-border e-commerce; (iv) electronic data exchange (e-Phyto); (v) sea containers; (vi) Single Window; and (vii) Time Release Study. These correspond to the priority areas of both Organizations.

The two Secretariats are currently in discussions concerning a revised Work Plan to cover the next period up to June 2025.

3. Sea containers

With the conclusion of the SCTF's mandate, the CPM established a CPM Sea Container Focus Group (SCFG) to further progress this body of work. The Terms of Reference of the IPPC SCFG implies WCO membership in the SCFG. As such, the WCO participated in all meetings of the SCFG and related sub-group meetings from September 2022 to November 2022 and provided information on the Authorized Economic Operator (AEO) programme and the WCO Data Model (WCO DM). In October 2022, a meeting was held at the WCO to provide overviews of the SCFG work and the WCO Data Model and AEO programme, and to discuss the potential next steps required to incorporate phytosanitary requirements into the AEO programme and to add data elements to assist in tracking the cleanliness status of sea containers under the WCO DM. The following points were explained and discussed:

- The role of the WCO DM, namely to simplify and standardize data requirements for the reporting of goods and cargo declarations for cross-border regulatory agencies, was noted. The WCO DM is a recommendation; however, countries may differ on requirements. The process for requesting the addition of new elements to the WCO DM via the meetings of the Data Model Project Team (DMPT) was also explained. The concept of capturing a container/cargo cleanliness statement by responsible parties for different types of consignments (FCL, FCX, LCL and empty consignments) through Customs declarations, and the potential to standardize these declarations and responsible parties through the WCO DM, was discussed.
- As AEOs form only a small component of global supply chain arrangements in participating countries, a broader framework that can be applied for all types of supply chains should be considered by the SCFG to meet current requirements, prior to any cross-agency harmonized approaches becoming available in the longer term; this framework should incorporate Pillar 3 of the SAFE Framework of Standards (SAFE FoS), which covers collaboration between agencies, and not just the AEO programme, which is Pillar 2 of the SAFE FoS. To further explore any cross-agency harmonized approaches, it was suggested that there would be value in inviting a representative from the SCFG to present at the WCO's AEO conference in 2024. It was advised that the SAFE FoS was revised every 3 years, with the next SAFE Review Cycle to be completed in 2025.

4. Cross-border E-Commerce

The IPPC Secretariat took part in the first periodic review of the WCO E-Commerce Package, conducted between January 2021 and June 2022.

In September 2022, the WCO Deputy Director for Compliance and Facilitation presented an overview of the WCO Framework of Standards on Cross-Border E-commerce (E-Commerce FoS) to the first International Plant Health Conference, which was co-organized by the IPPC Secretariat and the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) of the United Kingdom:

- The presentation highlighted the WCO E-Commerce Package and other tools developed by the WCO to support the implementation of the WCO E-Commerce FoS, providing innovative solutions to deal with the challenges e-commerce has brought to the international trade environment, characterized by high volumes of small packages and the participation of unknown players.
- The WCO E-Commerce FoS promotes the use of timely and accurate information to allow for early risk assessment and clearance of legitimate transactions in an automated environment with minimum need for physical interventions. It promotes the coordination between Customs and other relevant government agencies and trust-based partnerships between Customs and e-commerce stakeholders, such as e-commerce platforms and marketplaces.

In December 2022, a WCO Technical Officer responsible for e-commerce reviewed and provided feedback on the draft IPPC E-Commerce Guide for plants, plant products and other regulated articles which had been developed by an IPPC working group.

5. Participation of the WCO in the CPM

The WCO was invited to, and participated in, the 15th Session(2021) and 16th Session of the CPM (2022) as an observer.

6. Participation of the IPPC Secretariat at WCO meetings

The IPPC Secretariat has been invited to participate as an observer in appropriate WCO meetings such as the E-Commerce Working Group, the WCO WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement Working Group, the WCO SAFE Working Group and SAFE Sub-Groups, and the Permanent Technical Committee (PTC).

- An IPPC Secretariat representative took part in an informal virtual meeting in April 2021 and in the online part of the blended PTC meeting in May 2021 that discussed and reviewed two Annexes to the E-Commerce Package, “Reference Datasets for Cross-Border E-Commerce” and “Revenue Collection Approaches”, together with representatives from other international organizations such as the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), private sector entities including the Global Express Association and Amazon, and other observers including the Eurasian Economic Commission(EEC).

The IPPC Secretariat participated in the 5th WCO Global AEO Conference which was held virtually on 25-27 May 2021 in the breakout session entitled “Can SAFE/AEO/MRA implementation help enhance agricultural security?”.