



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 186 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.

COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE WCO AND IPPC SECRETARIATS

1. Agreement

There are several matters which are of common interest to the WCO and the IPPC Secretariats that 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 WCO Headquarters in Brussels on 19 June 2018.

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 maintaining close collaboration in key areas such as sea containers, ensuring the alignment of efforts to enhance trade facilitation and compliance.

2. Sea containers

With the conclusion of the Sea Container Task Force (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, including the Multilateral Frameworks Sub-Group, which focuses on incorporating phytosanitary aspects into the SAFE Framework of Standards (FoS), and the Data Model Sub-Group, which assesses the potential of adding data elements to track the cleanliness status of container units under the WCO Data Model.

At the 8th SAFE Review Sub-Group Meeting (September 2024), the IPPC introduced updated draft texts for two proposals to integrate biosecurity into the SAFE FoS : enhancing collaboration between Customs and biosecurity agencies (Proposal No. 19) and harmonized compliance procedures (Proposal No. 20). While some delegates supported these initiatives, concerns about overlaps with existing frameworks like the World Trade Organization (WTO) Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) and misalignment with the SAFE FoS's focus on supply chain security led to recommendations for further refinement.

At the 30th SAFE Working Group Meeting (November 2024), the proposals were further reviewed, and delegates agreed they required substantial revision to address these concerns and better align with Customs operations, deferring them to the next review cycle.

3. 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 WCO SAFE Working Group and SAFE Review Sub-Groups, and the Permanent Technical Committee (PTC).

Notably, at the 243rd/244th PTC Sessions in April 2024, the IPPC Secretariat participated as a panelist in a round table discussion on the WCO's 2024 theme, "Customs engaging traditional and new partners with purpose." The Secretariat highlighted the importance of collaboration with the WCO to ensure the safe trade of plants and plant products, address emerging risks such as pest contamination and e-commerce-related plant health issues, and promote technology integration.