



21st OCO ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2019

COMMUNIQUE

1. The 21st Annual Conference of the Oceania Customs Organization (OCO) under the theme ***“a united Pacific working towards a common solution”*** held a number of technical sessions relating to trade facilitation, revenue mobilization, Border security and digital capacity.
2. The Conference was hosted in Saipan, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, from 13 – 16 May 2019, 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, Guam, Kiribati, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Republic of Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Republic of Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. An apology was received from Solomon Islands. French Polynesia, Timor Leste, and Wallis and Futuna were not in attendance.
3. In attendance were invited representatives from IMF Pacific Financial and Technical Assistance Center (PFTAC), Japan Ministry of Finance, Joint Interagency Task Force (JIATF) West, Korea Customs Service, New Zealand Immigration, New Zealand Police, Pacific Immigration Development Community (PIDC), Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police (PICP), Commonwealth Casino Commission (CCC), Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS), Pacific Transnational Crime Coordination Centre (PTCCC), Pacific Community, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), United Nations International Narcotics Control Board (INCB), United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), United States Coast Guard – District 14 (USCG), United States Customs and Border Protection (CBP), United States Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), United States Department of Homeland Security (DHS), United States Patents and Trademarks Office (USPTO), United States Secret Service, WCO Regional Office for Capacity Building (ROCB), World Bank Group, World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Customs Organisation (WCO).

4. The Conference was officially opened by the Governor of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), Mr. Ralph Torres. Governor Torres, in his keynote address, outlined the importance of Customs adopting a regional approach to protecting our borders from illicit drugs, dangerous species and invasive species, as the effects of these activities in one country or territory affects other countries and territories. Opening remarks were also provided by the OCO Chair and Director of CNMI Customs, Mr. Jose Mafnas, the CNMI Attorney General, Mr. Edward Manibusan, the CNMI Secretary of Finance, Mr. David Atalig, and the Interim Head of the OCO Secretariat, Mr. Roy Lagolago.
5. The Deputy Secretary General of the WCO, Mr. Ricardo Trevino also addressed the Conference, acknowledging the historical collaboration and coordination between WCO and OCO, and the successes of the RKC in the Pacific since the accession workshop held in June 2017. Mr. Trevino also expressed sincere gratitude to the Government of the CNMI for the excellent arrangements in hosting the 2019 Annual Conference, and acknowledged the outgoing Head of the WCO ROCB, Asia Pacific, Mr Kazunari Igarashi, for his contribution to the Pacific.
6. The Conference witnessed the following three milestone events:

a) Accession of Cook Islands to the Revised Kyoto Convention

Cook Islands' Associate Minister of Finance, Mr. Tingika Elikana, representing the Government of the Cook Islands, deposited Cook Islands' instrument of accession to the International Convention on the Simplification and Harmonisation of Customs Procedures (Revised Kyoto Convention), with the Deputy Secretary General of the WCO, Mr. Ricardo Trevino. With this, Cook Islands becomes 117th Contracting Party, and the second non-WCO Member to accede to the Convention after Kiribati in 2018.

b) Accession of Tuvalu to the Revised Kyoto Convention

Tuvalu's Head of Customs, Mr. Tuilagi Teii, representing the Government of Tuvalu, deposited Tuvalu's instrument of accession to Revised Kyoto Convention, with the Deputy Secretary General of the WCO, Mr. Ricardo Trevino. With this,

Tuvalu becomes 118th Contracting Party, and the third non-WCO Member to accede to the Convention after Kiribati in 2018, and Cook Islands earlier.

c) Official signing ceremony of the Memorandum of Understanding between OCO and UNCTAD

The OCO and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development signed a Memorandum of Understanding to provide a general framework of cooperation between the parties, and to facilitate and strengthen collaboration in areas of common interest.

7. The Conference welcomed the presentations provided by OCO Member administrations, partner organisations and the OCO Secretariat on the benefits of a regional approach to trade facilitation reforms, potential improvements to national revenue mobilisation capacity through sharing of information and tax policy / administration reforms, and latest trends in criminal activity affecting the Pacific region and tools and resources available to assist in delivering an appropriate regional response to these criminal threats to address OCO Members' responsibilities outlined by Pacific Leaders under the Boe Declaration.
8. Members confirmed the appointment of Mr Richard Brennan as the OCO Head of Secretariat for a three year term. Mr. Brennan was congratulated by Members on his appointment. Members also thanked Mr. Roy Lagolago for acting in the role of Head of Secretariat and acknowledged his tireless efforts in delivering the excellent outcomes achieved by the OCO.
9. Members reviewed the remuneration framework proposed by the OCO Steering Committee on the basis of the review prepared by PwC and agreed to adopt the new remuneration framework.
10. Members welcomed the good progress and achievements made by the OCO Secretariat for the period from July 2018 to May 2019 reflected in OCO Interim Annual Report.

11. Members considered and approved a revised membership structure and fees, and staggered increases to membership fees, to be implemented from 1 July 2019.
12. Members noted the positive future impact of decisions on the OCO's financial position and accordingly endorsed the proposed three-year work program and budget for the period from 1 July 2019 to 30 June 2022. The Members commended the Secretariat for developing a work plan that addressed Member needs.
13. Members endorsed the appointment of Ernst and Young as external auditors to the OCO, and KPMG as internal auditors to the OCO, both for three year terms.
14. Members approved changes to the OCO Administration Policy to increase maternity leave provisions in accordance with host country legislations and delegated revisions relating to implementation of the revised remuneration structure to the OCO Steering Committee.
15. Members agreed to a review of the OCO charter, Steering Committee Terms of Reference and other related governance documents to ensure consistency and clarity between them. The review will report back to Members at the 2020 conference for endorsement.
16. Members accepted and thanked the Cook Islands for their offer to host the next annual conference in 2020, Federated States of Micronesia advised they will confirm host the 2021 Conference after consultation.
17. Other Business
 - a. Federated States of Micronesia requested for the Secretariat to consider automation solution for Small Island economies.
18. Members expressed their sincere gratitude to CNMI for its contribution as Chair of the OCO Annual Conference and Steering Committee in the past year, and welcomed Cook Islands as the new Chair for the conference for the next year.

19. The Conference was officially closed by Mr. Jose Mafnas, Director, CNMI Customs and outgoing Chair.