



October-December, 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



Season's greetings to you all.

2020 has been a difficult year, a lot different to what we anticipated, and a year where we've all been forced to re-

set and re-think what's important in our lives.

For now, we do not know what 2021 holds, but hope that with the vaccines, the world will return to some normalcy. Border security has never been as important as it was to our countries and people this year, as we all strived to keep

COVID-19 from entering through our various ports. Looking ahead, there are still some certainties, despite the uncertainty COVID-19 paints:

- ◆ Criminals will get more creative, and we have seen a rise in the trafficking of illicit drugs and contraband.

- ◆ Our Governments and customers expect faster and more IT-driven services to facilitate their trade.
- ◆ Our staff expect to be appropriately trained within an environment that fosters equality in the workplace.

As we agreed during our Annual Conference, we must continue to communicate and collaborate to keep ahead of the criminals, as well as continuing to share relevant and critical information in a timely manner with each other. We must also use the expertise available within the Secretariat where appropriate.

Given the challenges of 2020, I was particularly pleased to see the advancement of the Small Craft App deployment, and the Secretariat's initiatives with the virtual training offered to our officers. As the curtains falls on 2020, it would be remiss of me not to acknowledge the support of our partners who have helped us during this year - Australian Border Force, Fiji Revenue and Customs Services, New Zealand Customs,

United States Patent and Trade Office, International Narcotics Board, World Customs Organization and the Regional Office of Capacity Building, and the Centre for Customs Excise, Charles Stuart University, Australia.

Moving into 2021, whilst our fight against the spread of COVID-19 isn't over, and certainly not against transnational crime activities and the like, the FSM is looking forward to hosting you all in August for our annual Conference. Some of our administrations will also be looking forward to the commencement of the IT systems project being brought to us by UNCTAD, through PACER Plus and possible assistance through EDF 11 funding from the European Union to our PACP members.

I wish you and your families a wonderful and safe Christmas and New Year. See you all next year (hopefully).

- Mr. Salvador Jacob—OCO CHAIRPERSON, FSM CONTROLLER OF CUSTOMS

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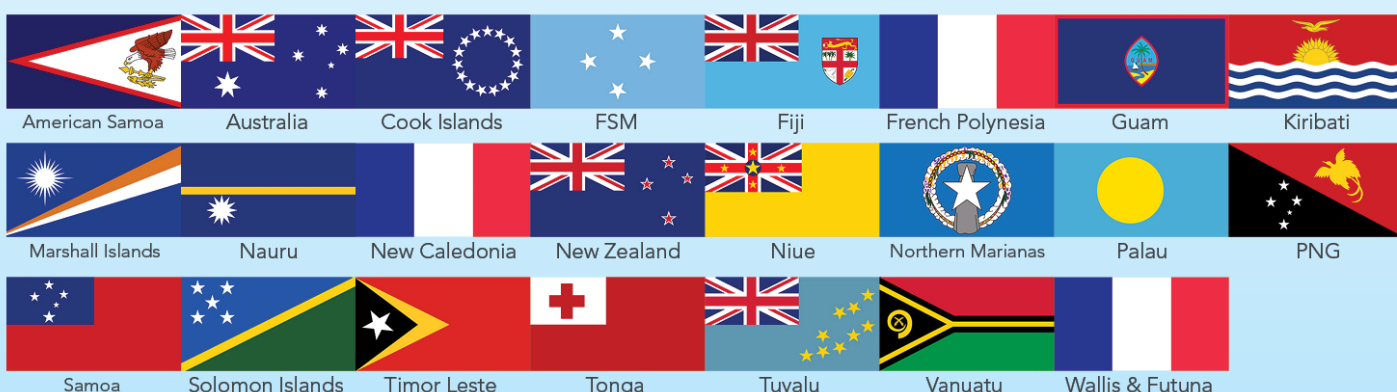
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OUR MEMBERS



OCO ANNUAL HEADS OF CUSTOMS MEETING



And the award for the most spirited team during the OCO Annual Heads of Customs conference goes to Tonga!

Tonga Customs was tasked with the opening prayer and devotion, and they did it in style. They had a choir of Customs officers blessing the meeting with their beautiful voices. They certainly set the tune and mood for the meeting.

Malo Tonga.

Highlights of OCO outgoing chair, Xavier Mitchell's address

Mr Xavier Mitchell, the Comptroller of Cook Islands Customs, in his opening remarks, acknowledged the commitment of OCO's major donor partners Australia, Fiji and New Zealand. He noted that many other OCO partners were unable to participate in this conference due to travel restrictions. The Chair thanked and acknowledged their contributions and also thanked the Vice Chair, the Steering Committee and its members as well as the Head of the Secretariat and his staff for all the work throughout the year as well as the preparation leading up to this conference.

Mr Mitchell stated that COVID-19 forcefully taught us to change our course and our ways rapidly and immediately. It has caused major impacts on our economies and Customs in the Pacific region; but it was however still critical that we continued to facilitate trade and earned revenue that was needed now more than ever for our governments.

The Chair further highlighted it was important to continue strengthening collective actions to effectively manage the regional security environment". The Chair further noted that "not only do nations have to protect themselves from COVID19, there were emerging threats within the Customs environment such as the trade of counterfeit goods, illicit financial flows, trafficking of people, drugs and weapons and money laundering that require strong focus."



From the Deputy Chairperson

"Well done everyone for managing these unprecedented times and getting through 2020. It has been extremely challenging year in the Cook Islands. Despite this we continued to effectively protect our border and facilitate trade and travel. Amongst hugely increased workloads it appears that just getting through the year has been a big achievement. In 2020

I would like OCO to focus on ensuring that decisions made are reflective of all members. This requires that all members engage in discussions prior to decisions being made.

I wish you all a Merry Christmas and a happy New Year. God bless."

Meitaki.

Mr Xavier Mitchell



COVID -19 TIP: Protect your staff so they could protect others. Provide personal protection equipment to staff, such as masks, gloves, sanitizers, etc.

HEADS OF CUSTOMS PLEDGE TO WORK TOGETHER



Customs administrations in the region are faced with similar challenges due to COVID-19 but have agreed to work together and collaborate more to ride out the COVID-19 pandemic.

At the conclusion of the OCO Heads Annual Conference on October 20, themed “Working together to build a safer Blue Pacific”, leaders of Customs administrations in the region stated the loss in revenue collection for their governments due to the closure of borders as their biggest cost of COVID-19. [READ MORE](#)

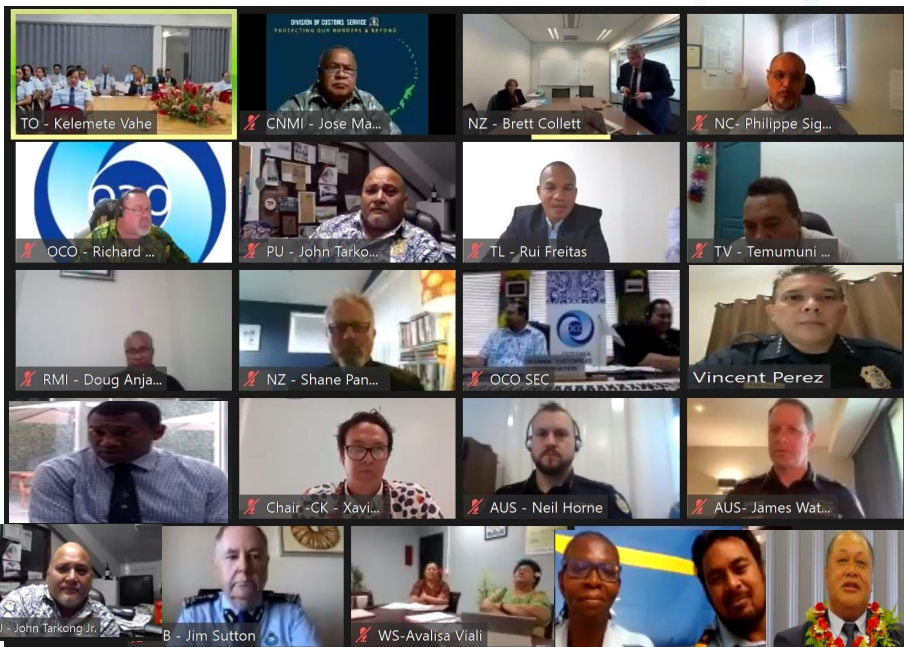
What the Heads of Customs Decided

- Members discussed the impact of COVID-19 on their respective countries and their national responses, including border measures to protect their citizens.
- Members noted the priorities placed on ensuring the facilitation of essential goods by Customs administrations are consistent with the health protocols that were in place. The significant drop of Customs revenue collection as a result of lower trade volumes and decline in tourism was a common impact felt by the OCO members and that measure to raise revenue remained members’ priorities in the post-COVID-19 environment.
- Members approved the two-year work program and budget for the period from 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2022. Members also highlighted and acknowledged the implementation challenges and commended the Secretariat for developing a work plan aimed at addressing members’ needs.

The work program incorporated core customs training modules based on international customs best practice and learning tools, including, modules developed by the Centre for Customs and Excise Studies in Australia.

In addition, members noted that the two-year work program 2020 – 2022 may negatively impact on the fiscal outlook for these years, but remain confident that this could be managed within existing resources. With the significant adverse impact on national and border revenues, member countries highlighted that revenue mobilisation remained a top priority for consideration in the work plan.

[READ MORE OF THE COMMUNIQUE HERE](#)



OCO CELEBRATES FIJI 50TH INDEPENDENCE DAY BY HELPING KIDS WITH CANCER



Happy Fiji Day!

OCO staff members joined the rest of the country to celebrate Fiji's 50th Independence Day.

According to #WHO, #cancer is a leading cause of death for children and adolescents worldwide. More than 80 per cent of children with #cancer are cured, but in many low and middle income countries only 20 percent are cured due to various reasons such as the inability to obtain an accurate diagnosis, inaccessible therapy, abandonment of treatment, death from toxicity (side effects), and excess relapse, in part due to lack of access to essential medicines and technologies. OCO Secretariat staff members in Suva, Fiji joined #Wows Kids- The Great Walk Challenge to raise funds for kids living with #cancer, walking 50km over two weeks. Funds raised were handed over to Wows Kids on Friday, October 9. Staff also celebrated Fiji's 50th Independence Day on the day.



Walking for cancer. OCO staff members walked 50km over two weeks to raise funds for kids living with cancer in Fiji.



OCO Secretariat Christmas Dinner

09.12.2020

OCO SECRETARIAT IN THE NEWS

OCTOBER

Role of customs agencies during and post COVID-19 [READ MORE](#)

Refresher Training on PACER Plus Rules of Origin [READ MORE](#)

Fiji 50th and The Pacific Way [READ MORE](#)

Revenue Security a Priority for Customs Heads [READ MORE](#)

Heads of Customs Pledge to Work Together [READ MORE](#)

NOVEMBER

Kigali Amendment: Pacific Discuss Progress [READ MORE](#)

APAN System: Improving exchange of information [READ MORE](#)

PCA Training WCO//ROCB [READ MORE](#)

INTA ANNUAL MEETING [READ MORE](#)

DECEMBER

OCO Hosts Information Sharing Working Group meeting [READ MORE](#)

Training on Small Craft Information Gathering [READ MORE](#)

USPTO /ICHIP webinars on COVID-19 Enforcement, Trade Related IPR Issues [READ MORE](#)

OCO Supports PPP in Fight Against Illicit Trade of Dangerous Substances [READ MORE](#)

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IN THE NEWS

Not secure | pina.com.fj/index.php?r=pacnews&m=read&o=12412943295f8d2d687a755d63ece2

Revenue security a priority for Customs heads in the region

06:08 am GMT+12, 19/10/2020, Fiji

Revenue security is a priority for heads of Customs administrations in the Oceania region when they virtually meet Tuesday for their annual conference.

"We all know the chaos COVID-19 has caused and the impacts on various economies, for customs organisations in the Pacific region it is critical that they continue to facilitate trade and earn revenue that is now more needed than ever for their governments," OCO Head of Secretariat, Richard Brennan said.

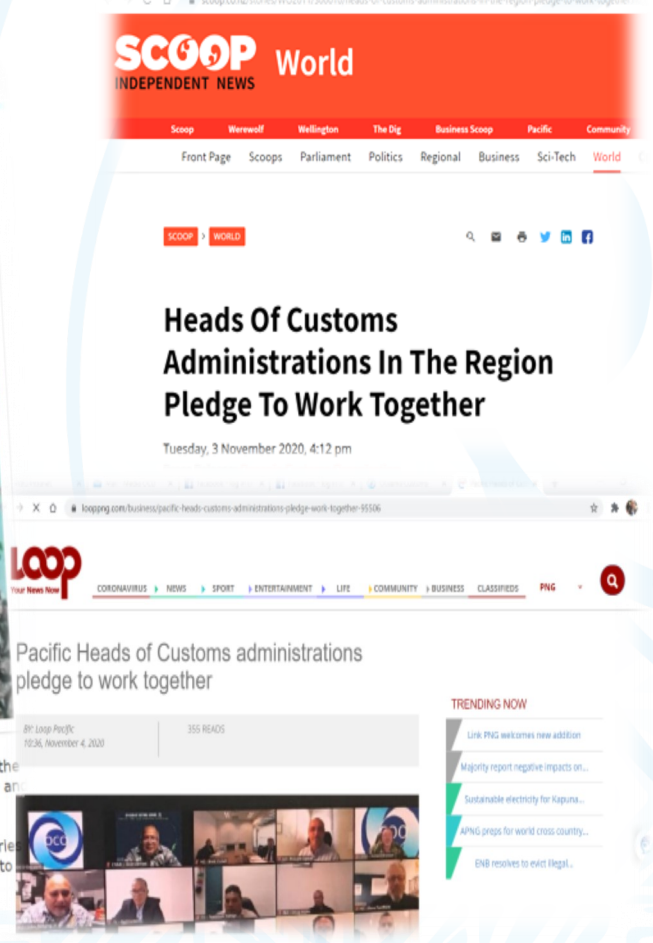
"Our Pacific leaders had reaffirmed the need for strengthened collective actions to effectively manage the regional security environment. In the region, we are seeing emerging threats within the customs environment such as the trade of counterfeit goods, illicit financial flows, trafficking of people, drugs and weapons and money laundering- we have to manage these as well as protect our nations from COVID-19."

The OCO Annual Conference was scheduled to take place in Cook Islands in July but was cancelled due to COVID-19.

The Heads meeting tomorrow, chaired by Xavier Mitchell, Comptroller of the Cook Island Customs Service is expected to be attended by the 23 heads of Customs administrations in the Pacific.

During the virtual meeting, members will discuss issues relating to the OCO areas of work, key of which is the OCO Secretariat's annual work program and budget to enable the continual delivery of technical assistance and capacity building for members.

Members will also discuss COVID-19 and the challenges the pandemic has posed on their respective countries and how they can work collaboratively with each other and regional and international partners to respond to these challenges.



OCO TRAINING UPDATES

USPTO WEBINAR SERIES



OCO and its members are continuing to benefit from the US Department of Justice (USDOJ) – International Computer Hacking and Intellectual Property (ICHIP) and the US Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) webinar series on COVID-19 crimes as well as a series on the dark web. The first series of webinars were held from May to July followed by another series held from 14 October-18 November as well as the current one running from the 30th November to the 16th December, with participation from law enforcement officers and relevant stakeholders from across Asia Pacific region. You can read more [HERE](#)

FEEDBACK FROM USPTO WEBINAR PARTICIPANTS

How has this training benefitted you/your administration?

"It's a refresher, it helped to retain the knowledge I have in interviewing from the REID technique. The training allowed me to see verbiage from another LEO's perspective. Specifically, knock and talk at a crime scene. He also gave an example of downplaying the charge by stating that you are looking for someone who committed a larger infraction. wing a person rather than the REID technique." - **Guam**

"Process exhibits during raids especially electronics." - **Tonga**

"We have gained knowledge on the available resources for IPR Reinforces what we are learning in other platforms (ie Interpol IPR training module)" - **CNMI**

"Great information and provide good knowledge on trends and what impact on small administrations." – **Niue**.

What's the highlight of the training for you?

"The instructor was able to show strengths and weaknesses in a couple of interview styles. The instructor emphasized the need to build a rapport and establish baseline behaviors. Establish a commonality to get more information out of the detainee i.e. sports team. He showed videos on classic good guy, bad guy interviews and others where every person has a story (don't judge a book by its cover)." Personally, I would have liked to learn about the PEACE method in

interviewing a person rather than the REID technique. – **Guam**

"The highlight is that private-public partnership is very important. I wish the training event were also recorded."

Recommendation: Have the webinar training series available for viewing afterwards." - **CNMI**

"The importance of good systems, resources and updated legal framework. Collaboration is important at the national level and also regional, information sharing is also key." - **Niue**

"Debit card scam fraud and case studies." - **Tonga**.

"The webinar sessions were indeed very informative and interesting with regard to how organized criminal/crime syndicates operate in the US and the reality that smaller island countries like Fiji are also vulnerable to illegal activities as such. I was particularly interested in the Dark Web and Business Email Compromise (BEC) Investigation presentation. The sessions were also an eye opener as the presentations clearly emphasized on investigation techniques and mechanisms in place that were executed resulting in successful prosecution. Even as we consider that the US is amongst the leading nations in the world, there is no restriction as to where or how criminal syndicates can target or what controls are in place that they can infiltrate" - **Fiji**

Papua New Guinea Customs Services (PNGCS) extends its sincere gratitude

towards the Oceania Customs Organization Secretariat (OCO) for the opportunity to experience the United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) and United States Department of Justice (USDOJ) Webinar Series on the Enforcement Against COVID-19 Crime Series.

PNGCS attendees to the sessions was 17 comprising of both males (10) and females (7) in accordance to relevant work areas to the topic of the series of webinars.

The sessions were informative and beneficial especially in terms of awareness on best practices for consideration to improve and enhance the presence of Customs as an enforcement agency and the importance of inter-governmental, regional and global cooperation and collaboration and, how our efforts valuably contribute to international standards.

The take out from the sessions included;

- The awareness included sharing of best practices on threats, challenges, opportunities available and resounding on the importance of collaboration and cooperation amongst border agencies, public and business, and international stakeholders.

- - The opportunity gave an insight to areas we are yet to tap into and has provoked relevant work areas to collaborate on how best to move forward

Once again, the PNGCS expresses its deep appreciation of the sessions and looks forward to future opportunities in this space to enhance our efforts in combatting illicit trading. – **PNG**



Why is it important to comply with the Kigali Amendment?

The Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer entered into force on 1 January 2019. Action under the Amendment will help reduce the production and consumption of hydrofluorocarbons, potent Green House Gases and therefore to avoid global warming. Chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) and hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs) are commonly used in refrigeration and air conditioning units.

For the Pacific Island Countries (PICs) in particular, although we maybe smallest consumers of these ozone depleting substance, we are very well aware of the adverse impact that will have on our islands and so the countries have continued to work towards compliance of the Protocol.

How prepared are customs administrations in the region to implement the Kigali Amendment of the Montreal Convention?

One of the important requirements of the Kigali Amendment is that an import and export licencing system for HFCs needs to be in place in each country that is Party to the Amendment (by 2021).

To be able to do this effectively countries need to monitor and record importation and exportation of HFC. Customs administration are responsible for collecting this data using the multipurpose international product nomenclature, Harmonised Commodity System (HS).

The majority of the Pacific Island countries have adopted HS 2017, which currently has single HS code for all HFCs and does not allow differentiation of the individual

chemicals or of mixtures. Noting this limitation in HS 2017, the WCO had recommended the creation of additional subdivision for HFCs in countries national HS until entry into force of the HS 2022.

HS 2022 includes specific HS codes for the most commonly traded HFCs and mixtures. This is a challenge for the customs administrations in Pacific to ensure those amendments are incorporated by 1 January, 2021 to effectively enforce for the licensing regime. The implementation of new edition of HS in the Pacific is a challenge on its own. OCO had undertaken extensive work and capacity building for members in 2017-2019 to ensure the implementation of HS 2017.

In a recent meeting with UNEP, the countries have indicated that they prefer to wait until HS 2022 in order to implement the HFC and HFC blends HS Codes. The question then, is what can the countries do now?

The agreement comes into effect in January, what measures can customs administrations who are party to the Convention take to comply with the amendment

Given that it is very unlikely that none of the countries will implement the temporary measures recommended by WCO, through the discussions with the UNEP PIC Network, the countries are urged to explore and the following measures:

Customs to manually record all HFCs and HFC blends imported and training needs to be conducted on how this will be implemented. As countries will be including the control of HFCs and HFC blends in the legislations, any import will be subject to documentation check by Customs.

Establishing a good network with importers, industry and customs brokers/agents to track the HFC and HFC blends imports including conducting periodic inspections and viewing logbooks and inspection records.

Agency cooperation between Customs and Department of Environment should be established for investigation and data reconciliation purposes. The OCO is in

consultation with UNEP will be looking to conduct training in 2021 to assist customs administrations with the above measures.

What is OCO doing to help members who are party to the agreement?

Aside from that above, the OCO is also taking a proactive measure to assist members with the HS 2022 implementation. To assist members especially the small island states with HS implementation, the OCO had developed the Pacific Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System (PACHS) in collaboration with regional and international partners in 2017.

The work on review of PACHS 2017 to PACHS 2022 is already underway.

In this regard, OCO is also working with the UNEP on the Draft HS Code for HCFCs, HFCs and Mixtures to be incorporated at regional subheading level (7th and 8th digit level).

We're aiming to finalize PACHS 2022 by February next year and the countries have about 10 months to do the necessary work for implementation of HS 2022.

Once this in place, then the classification of HFC and HFC blends is harmonised across our region and the countries are able to have more comprehensive collection of data of these products at the national level. The other critical role that customs administration play is the detection and prevention of illegal trade in ODS.

OCO the past have provided training to members in collaboration with other partners. There are some discussions to undertake similar training virtually in 2021.

Overall, customs role maybe evolving in this context to more monitoring and reporting trade data on these chemicals but nonetheless remains an important one. OCO values the ongoing partnership and collaboration with UNEP to provide support to member countries to effectively implement their obligations under the Kigali Amendment.

****Mrs Laisiana Tugaga is OCO Trade and Revenue Management Adviser. She could be contacted on ltugaga@ocosec.org**

MEMBER NEWS



Vanuatu Highlights

Work currently underway to link the ASYCUDA Passenger Module to the INTERPOL global database, to alert Customs when persons of interest or stolen passports are being processed at the borders.

.....
To maintain enforcement capacity in Customs, refresher trainings on the Customs Act and the ASYCUDA Offense Module were conducted for Customs Officials in Santo. Similar refresher trainings were also conducted earlier for Port Vila officers.

.....
Vanuatu is now the only Pacific country, and probably in many countries in the world, to have all three border agencies, Customs (1999), Immigration (2018) and now Biosecurity (2020), automated in a single electronic system.
Congratulations and well done Vanuatu!

Pic Credit: Vanuatu Customs



Tonga Highlights

Tonga conducted awareness sessions on the PACER Plus Agreement, which came into effect on December 13, across the kingdom.

Also, the Revenue Department of the Ministry of Revenue and Customs introduced a new initiative known as the “TOE TALATALANO” or “Lets keep talking”.

This initiative focused only on awareness and ways to assist people regarding tax matters.

The Ministry’s Facebook post said: *“Our revenue officers will be able to visit your ministry, your business, your home or anywhere you may be to allow us to be able to get to know you, share your problems and identify ways in which we can solve them. Our Ministry will also be able to provide ways to make your tax obligations easier for you.”*

Pic Credit: MRC Tonga

Fiji Highlight

Fiji Revenue and Customs Office has moved to a new office in Nadi, close to the Nadi International Airport. Fiji’s Minister of Economy and Attorney General, Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum opened the new office.

“The shift from Fiji Revenue Customs Authority to Services holds to the notion that FRCS is not some authority sitting on top but is there as a partner to its customers, and to its clients,” he said.

He added FRCS needed to be creative and efficient in announcing policy initiatives whether it was to do with facilitating investment or tax incentives and that the speed and efficiency they needed to bring along was very critical in a depressed investment environment.

Pic credit: DINFO, FIJI



UPCOMING TRAINING

TIMELINE 2021	COHORT 1	COHORT 2
January 11-30 (3 weeks)	Customs Risk Management (Cert III)	
February 8 to 27 (3 weeks)	Ethics and Governance (Cert III)	
March 8 to 27 (3 weeks)	Enforcement and Compliance Management (Cert III)	
April 5 to 24 (3 weeks)	Valuation (Cert III)	Cargo and Travelers (Cert III)
May 3 –22 (3 weeks)	Tariff (Cert III)	
May 31-June 26 (4 weeks)	Valuation (Cert IV)	Cargo and Travelers (Cert IV)
July 5 -31 (4 weeks)	Tariff (Cert IV)	

**THE OCO SECRETARIAT OFFICE IN SUVA, FIJI WILL BE CLOSED
FROM 21 –31 DECEMBER 2020**



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Organization



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