



April ~ June 2024

Vision: The OCO to be recognised as a dynamic Regional Customs Secretariat that collaborates with regional and global partners to develop and deliver high quality and sustainable outputs to Member administrations.

OCEANIA CUSTOMS ORGANIZATION NEWSLETTER

FOREWORD

Empowering Pacific Customs: Strengthening Borders, Facilitating Trade



The Pacific region, with its vast ocean expanses and dispersed island nations, faces unique challenges in managing its borders and facilitating trade.

We are all aware that Customs agencies play a vital role in this landscape, ensuring secure and efficient cross-border movement of goods while safeguarding our communities. In this edition of our newsletter, we share the critical importance of capacity building for Pacific Customs that align with regional and international strategies.

Capacity building is not merely about training individuals; it's about strengthening entire organisations and systems. It's about empowering customs officers with the knowledge, skills, and

tools they need to effectively combat illicit trade, facilitate legitimate commerce, and protect our borders from security threats. This includes providing access to modern technology, fostering leadership development, and promoting regional cooperation. In the Pacific, capacity building takes on added significance.

Our unique geographical context requires specialised expertise in areas such as maritime surveillance, risk management for small island economies, and the protection of our unique biodiversity. Furthermore, building strong customs administrations contributes to good governance, strengthens revenue collection, and promotes economic growth – all crucial elements for sustainable development in the Pacific.

By investing in our customs officials, we invest in the future of the Pacific. We build resilience, enhance trade, and strengthen our collective ability to address the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

Vinaka vakalevu

Nancy T Oraka
OCO Head of Secretariat

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OUR MEMBERS



April - June Activity Highlights

Pacific's First Vessel Boarding and Seizure Training Facility Opens in Fiji

Twenty one Customs, Immigration and Fisheries Officers from nine Pacific Island Countries helps to enhance their skills in underway vessel boarding and search methods and improving efforts in combatting Transnational Organised Crimes and Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated fishing. Training was held at the first Pacific Vessel Boarding and Search Training Facility at the Fijian Naval Base in Togalevu, Fiji. This was constructed through the support of JICA and the Global Maritime Crime Programme (GMCP) of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and in partnership with the Fiji Maritime Surveillance and Rescue Coordination Centre (FMSRCC).



Trainees at the Fijian facility. PC: UNODC

Focus on Undervaluation in Trade



Participants of the workshop in Fiji. PC: OCO

Customs officers from across the Pacific were in Fiji in May for a Week of Action as part of a Regional Operation on Trade Risk & Enforcement. Led by the Australian Border Force (ABF) in partnership with the Oceania Customs Organisation (OCO) Secretariat and supported by the New Zealand Customs Service, this initiative aimed to address revenue losses and promote fair trade practices.

Pacific Women's Professional Development Program

Ms. Stephanie Waqanivalagi achieved another milestone in her career, receiving a prestigious certificate from the Pacific Women's Professional Development Program. The occasion was marked by a special presentation in the OCO office, with Mr. Uriah Turner, Australian Border Force's Counsellor for Pacific Offshore Network, and Ms. Nancy Oraka, Head of Secretariat for the Oceania Customs Organisation (OCO), recognising her professional accomplishment. The certification highlights the ongoing commitment to developing women's leadership and professional skills in the Pacific region, underscoring the importance of empowering talented professionals like Ms. Waqanivalagi.



Ms Waqanivalagi with OCO Head of Secretariat, Ms Nancy T Oraka and ABF's Uriah Turner. PC: OCO

OCO and MSG discuss opportunities and regional workplans

Representatives from the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) Secretariat and the Oceania Customs Organisation (OCO) met to strengthen regional relationships. Ms. Sovaia Marawa from MSG met with OCO's Operations Manager Ms. Laisa Naivalurua and Trade & Revenue Management Advisor Mr. John Sam for an informal exchange. While primarily a courtesy visit, the dialogue provided an opportunity to maintain open lines of communication and foster ongoing professional relationships between the two secretariats.

April - June Activity Highlights

Workshop on Post Clearance Audit and Risk Management



Our Head of Secretariat, Nancy T Oraka launched the Post Clearance Audit & Risk Management Workshop in Nadi, Fiji in May. We are grateful to our partners from Japan & New Zealand Customs for their generous support. This workshop is about strengthening customs operations and trade facilitation in our Blue Pacific. The workshop was an important capacity building activity under OCO's Strategic Priority Area Four – Revenue Management and Compliance. There was a total of 13 participants from 11 OCO member countries including CNMI, Cook Islands, Fiji, French Polynesia, Guam, Niue, Palau, PNG, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. Post Clearance Audit is one of the customs centric measures of the World Trade Organisation Trade Facilitation Agreement and when applied in a risk-based manner allows Customs to target resources effectively and work in partnership with the business community to improve compliance levels and facilitate trade.

IMPACT Continues With Gap Analysis

The IMPACT Project has successfully conducted legal and technical gap analyses on the WTO TFA, RKC, and iEPA in 15 PACP countries. The findings have been presented to country heads, marking a crucial step forward in our project.

Key Milestones:

- Gap Analysis Report: 29 February 2024
- Gap Analysis Webinar with PACP Heads: 14 March 2024
- Country-specific Gap Drafting: 18-22 March 2024
- Bilateral Virtual Meetings: Ongoing

- Regional Workshop (in-person): Proposed for May/June 2024

Business Process Reengineering (BPR) Implementation: May/June 2024 - Project End

Progress:

- 14 PACP country bilateral sessions completed
- Timor Leste session pending
- Country representatives provided valuable inputs
- Draft Action Plan under review by OCO

SPOTLIGHT

Fonoti-Talaitupu Leads Samoa Customs



Meet Fonoti Talaitupu Lia Taefu, the CEO of the Ministry of Customs and Revenue, whose journey in Customs began in January 2003 as a Post Compliance Audit Officer in the Samoa Customs Department.

Over the years, she has progressed through various roles, culminating in her appointment as CEO in April 2023. Despite facing challenges and the perception of Customs as a male-dominated field, Talaitupu remained determined and committed. In this interview, she shares insights into her professional journey and the challenges and opportunities for women in leadership roles in Customs.

Madame Vivish of French Polynesia



Madame Vaea Vivish, is an inspiration for women in leadership roles in customs. She shares her incredible journey, from starting her career at age 20 to becoming

the Manager for Activity and Performance Monitoring. Madame Vivish also offers valuable insights on:

- The challenges facing women in customs leadership
- How she promotes diversity and inclusion in her organisation
- Her advice for young women aspiring for similar roles

Read our full Q&A: <https://www.ocosoc.org/question-answer-with-madame-vaea.../>

April - June Activity Highlights

OCO & AUSTRAC discuss possible activities through PFIC



OCO's Head of Secretariat and Operations Team met with Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre (AUSTRAC) Liaison officer, Ms. Mandy Liang based at the Australian High Commission in Suva, to discuss possible collaborative activities through a regional partnership with the Pacific Financial Intelligence Community (PFIC).

This networking opportunity would help strengthen the relationship between Customs administrations and Financial Intelligence Units in the region. OCO has been invited to present at a PFIC Tradecraft Tuesday session in July to share the role of OCO.

Pacific Security Conference Charts Course for 2050

The Oceania Customs Organisation (OCO) Secretariat and members joined the Pacific Regional and National Security Conference from 24-26 June 2024, hosted by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat in Suva, Fiji. Organised by the Pacific Security College, the three-day event was followed by the Forum Officials Committee Subcommittee on Regional Security meeting on 27 June 2024. Twelve regional members, including Australia, Fiji, New Zealand, and Pacific island nations, sent 15 participants to the conference. The objective was to strategically explore and identify potential futures for the Blue Pacific by 2050, focusing on collective actions to enhance regional resilience and preparedness. The conference provided a crucial platform for collaborative dialogue on emerging regional security challenges and opportunities.



25th Pacific Immigration Development Community (PIDC)



At the 26th Pacific Immigration Development Community (PIDC) Regular Annual Meeting (RAM) held in Honiara, Solomon Islands from June 25th to 27th, 2024, OCO was represented by Operations Manager, Laisa Naivalurua. Ms. Naivalurua delivered presentations addressing critical issues, including:

- Maritime Border Challenges: Emerging Maritime Trends in the Pacific
- Countering Serious Organised Crime: People Smuggling, Human Trafficking, and Drugs

She also met Mr. Peter Hughes, Controller of the Solomon Islands Customs and Excise Division (SLICED), their discussions focused on capacity building needs and challenges faced by SLICED.

PNG Records High Revenue Collection

Prime Minister Hon. James Marape has applauded PNG Customs for recording high growth rates over the past five years. Prime Minister Marape, while commenting on PNG Customs performance report for May 2024, said despite the tough economic times facing the country, PNG Customs was doing exceptional-

ly well. "PNG Customs has recorded K3.9 billion in revenue collections for last year (2023), which is the highest under any government," said PM Marape. With the continuing increase in the revenue collections, PNG Customs said it is optimistic that it would meet the Govern-

OCO Secretariat News

Laisa Kubuabola-Naivalurua appointed as OCO Operations Manager



The Oceania Customs Organisation Revenue and Customs Service and the Fiji (OCO) welcomes Laisa Kubuabola-Naivalurua as their new Operations Manager. Laisa brings extensive experience in customs and border security, having served with the Fiji OCO Secretariat in a regional capacity. She is a WCO certified trainer and has participated in numerous regional customs programs. Laisa is excited to contribute her expertise to the Financial Intelligence Unit.

Woo is IT



We recently appointed Mr Darryl Woo as our IT & Communications officer. Darryl comes with over 20 years of experience in the field of IT having previously worked for the Pacific Community (SPC) and the South Pacific Geoscience Commission (SOPAC). He has a Trade Certificate in Graphic Designs and holds a bachelor's degree in Information Systems.

OBITUARY



Rest in Love Mr Jose Antonio Fatima Abilio

We offer our condolences to Timor Leste Customs Authority after the sad passing of its head, Jose Antonio Fatima Abilio. Mr Abilio was a dedicated civil servant who transformed Timor Leste's Customs Authority. A father of six, he held key roles including Vice Director of Planning and Chief of Staff of the Finance Minister's Office during his civil service career.

Appointed Customs Commissioner in 2014, Mr. Abilio modernised the agency by simplifying customs codes, aligning with international standards, and developing 30 Standard Operating Procedures. He implemented a single window system involving 13 government agencies and navigated significant challenges, including trade management during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Known for his commitment to transparency and economic development, he worked to increase Timor Leste's prosperity through strategic customs reforms. Despite the challenges of leading a young nation's customs service, Mr. Abilio remained focused on institutional improvement and public service. He will be remembered for his significant contributions to Timor Leste's governmental infrastructure and his dedication to national progress.



- Mr Jose Antonio Fatima Abilio.

UPCOMINGEVENTS

July
2024

CERT IV Topic - Revenue Stream: Electives/ Enforcement Stream: Electives - Cont'd	01 Jul - 15 Jul
CERT IV Topic - Revenue Stream: Electives/ Enforcement Stream: Electives	01 Jul - 12 Aug
CERT III Topic - Revenue Stream: Electives/ Enforcement Stream: Electives	08 - 19 Jul
Executive Leadership Retreat (Heads of Customs)	25- 26 Jul
26th OCO Annual Conference, Cook Islands	29 - 31 Jul

August
2024

CERT IV Topic - Revenue Stream: Electives/ Enforcement Stream: Electives - Cont'd	01 - 12 Aug
Joint Heads of Pacific Security Conference	09 Aug
CERT III Topic - Enforcement Stream: Electives	05 - 26 Aug
Industry Advisory Committee - Meeting/Workshop	13 - 16 Aug
CERT IV Topic - Final Assessment	19 Aug
PICP Annual Conference 2024, Tonga	18 - 22 Aug

September
2024

CERT III Topic - Final Assessment	02 Sep
Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police Annual Conference	3-4 Sep
PITAA Annual Heads Meeting, Port Vila, Vanuatu	16 - 18 Sep
Customs Control over Trade in Toxic Chemicals	24 - 26 Sep
Business Process Re-engineering Workshop	24 - 26 Sep

GALLERY



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