



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

"Strengthening Partnerships for Dynamic Solutions and a Future-ready Blue Pacific"



Oceania's customs administrations stand at a crossroads. The challenges we face are multifaceted and ever-evolving: the scourge of transnational crime, the complexities of global trade, the constant pressure to safeguard our borders while facilitating legitimate movement of people and goods. In this dynamic environment, one thing is clear: we are stronger together.

"Strengthening Partnerships for Dynamic Solutions and a Future-ready Blue Pacific" – the clarion call of our recent OCO Annual Conference – is more than just a catchy theme. It's a fundamental philosophy that must guide our every action. The conference itself, a vibrant hub of knowledge sharing and collaboration, embodied this spirit. But the true test lies in how we translate those inspiring words into concrete action.

We must seize the momentum. The recent PIDC meeting in Honiara, where OCO Operations Manager, Laisa Naivalurua delivered compelling insights on maritime security and combatting organised crime, provided a glimpse of what's possible when we pool our expertise and resources. Such regional cooperation is not merely desirable, it's essential.

Capacity building, too, hinges on effective partnerships. By sharing knowledge, technology, and best practices, we empower each other to meet emerging challenges head-on. Investing in our collective strength is an investment in the future of our Blue Pacific. This requires a shift in mindset. We must move beyond narrow national interests and embrace a truly regional perspective. A future-ready Blue Pacific demands that we break down silos, foster open communication, and work together with a shared sense of purpose. Only then can we harness the true potential of our collective strength and create a secure and prosperous future for all.

Nancy T Oraka
OCO Head of Secretariat.

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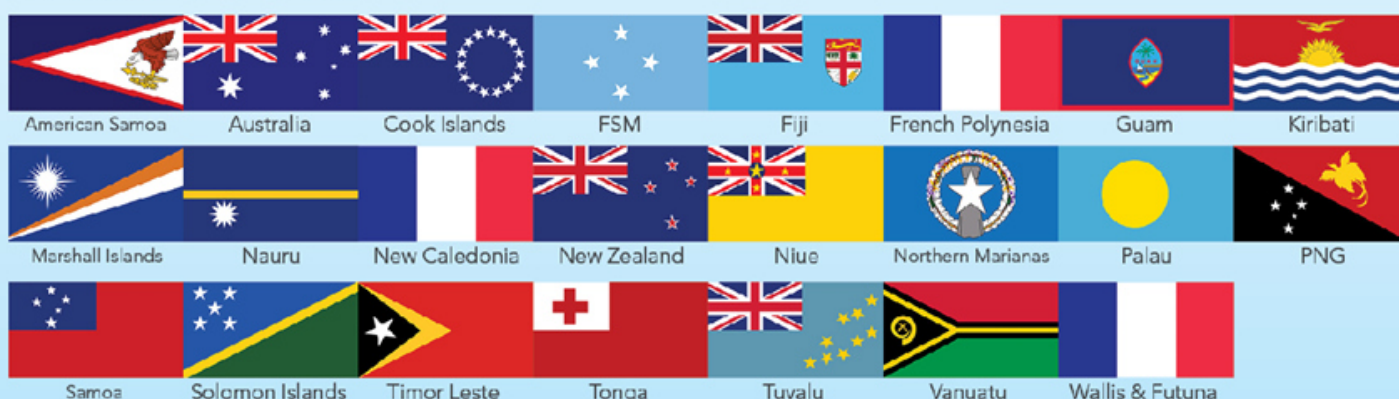
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OUR MEMBERS



26th OCO Annual Conference



The 26th OCO Annual Conference themed *“Strengthening Partnerships for Dynamic Solutions and a Future-ready Blue Pacific”* was held at the Edgewater Resort & Spa in Rarotonga, Cook Islands, from July 29th to 31st, 2024. The conference was opened by **‘The Honorable Prime Minister’ for Cook Islands, Mark Brown**, who in his opening speech emphasised the urgency of regional cooperation in safeguarding the Pacific’s future.



Outgoing OCO Chairperson and Head of Cook Islands Customs, **Ms. Rachel Goodwin** stressed the importance of embracing digital transformation to enhance capabilities and adapt to evolving landscapes of trade and security. **Ms. Nancy T. Oraka**, Head of the Oceania Secretariat emphasised the importance of collaboration among member states and partners.

[Read More](#)

July - September Highlights

Pacific Nations Grapple With Counterfeit Goods and Intellectual Property



Ms Nancy T. Oraka, Head of Secretariat (pictured) of the Oceania Customs Organisation (OCO), addressed the Pacific Colloquium on Consumer Protection, painting a stark picture of the region's struggle with counterfeit goods and the complexities of intellectual property rights (IPR). "The trade in counterfeit and illicit goods poses a grave threat," Ms. Oraka said, citing the economic damage, risks to public safety. She emphasised the growing recognition of IPR's vital role in fostering innovation and economic growth, particularly in a region increasingly connected to the global marketplace. Ms. Oraka also acknowledged the unique hurdles faced by Pacific Island nations, including limited resources and the need to reconcile modern IPR regimes with traditional knowledge systems. Despite these challenges, she pointed to significant progress: modernised laws, participation in international treaties, and a burgeoning interest in geographical indications to protect culturally significant products like kava.

The delicate balance between IPR protection and access to essential knowledge, especially in healthcare and education, remains a key concern. Ms. Oraka stressed the need for further research and data collection to inform policy decisions.

Highlighting the partnership between OCO and the United States Patent and Trademark Office, Ms. Oraka lauded their joint efforts in legislative reform and public awareness. Her closing message was a call to action, urging collective efforts to build a Pacific region where intellectual property rights are upheld, innovation thrives, and the well-being of its citizens is secured.

OCO & MSG Renew Agreement

The Oceania Customs Organisation (OCO) renewed its resource-sharing agreement with the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG), marking a significant step towards a safer and more prosperous region. The collab promises to bolster efforts in combating illicit trade, transnational crime, and border security threats. The agreement facilitates the exchange of critical resources, including information, technology, training programs, and personnel, between OCO and MSG member countries: Fiji, Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea, and the Solomon Islands. By pooling expertise and strengthening cooperation, Oceania's customs administrations aim to present a united front against the increasingly complex challenges facing the region.

"This renewed partnership underscores our commitment to regional security and economic stability," said OCO Head of Secretariat, Nancy T Oraka. "By working together with the MSG, we can enhance our collective capacity to address shared threats and protect our communities." In his opening remarks, Director General of the MSG

Secretariat, Leonard Louma, said that the MSG collectively has a corresponding responsibility to be at the forefront of regional cooperative and collective actions that seek to better serve and better respond to the needs of our people. This collaboration exemplifies the growing recognition of regional cooperation as a vital tool in addressing the multifaceted challenges of the 21st century. By sharing resources and expertise, Oceania is taking proactive steps to safeguard its future and build a more secure and prosperous region for all.



Ms Nancy T Oraka and Mr Leonard Louma

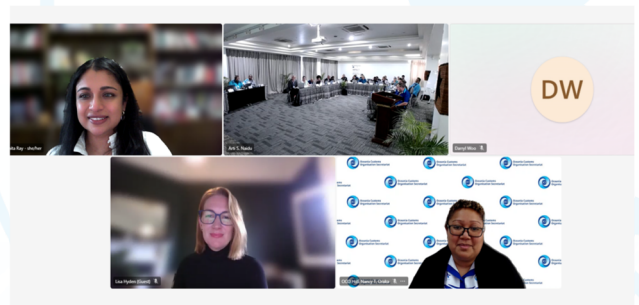
Celebrating our CERT IV Graduates!

The Oceania Customs Organisation (OCO) is proud to announce the graduation of its latest cohort of customs officials from the Certificate IV (CERT IV) program. These dedicated professionals have successfully completed a rigorous training program equipping them with the advanced skills and knowledge necessary to excel in modern customs administration. This achievement marks a significant investment in the future of trade security and efficiency across the Pacific. The CERT IV program, developed in collaboration with Charles Sturt University's Centre for Customs & Excise Studies, provides comprehensive training in critical areas such as risk management, valuation, trade facilitation, and enforcement. "OCO is committed to empowering customs officials through capacity building initiatives like this one," said OCO Head of Secretariat, Nancy T Oraka said. "By investing in the professional development of our officials, we are strengthening our collective ability to facilitate legitimate trade, protect our borders, and promote economic growth throughout the region." The CERT IV program is part of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) Improving Pacific Islands Customs and Trade (IMPACT) project. This initiative underscores the importance of international collaboration in building a more resilient and prosperous Pacific. OCO extends its congratulations to the graduates and acknowledges their dedication to upholding the highest standards of customs professionalism. Their expertise will play a crucial role in fostering a secure and efficient trade environment that benefits the entire Pacific community.



Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Initiative

The Oceania Customs Organisation (OCO) is working to increase female representation in customs leadership roles across the Pacific. A partnership between the EU, UNCTAD, and OCO will focus on capacity building and promoting inclusive policies to address the current underrepresentation of women in the sector.



Currently, only 4 out of 15 Pacific member countries have female Heads of Customs. The initiative aims to break down barriers and create a more equitable environment through training, knowledge sharing, and mentorship. The OCO is committed to tracking progress and working with member countries to achieve a more inclusive customs sector in the Pacific.

OCO Secretariat News

Oceania Customs Cuts Red Tape to Boost Pacific Trade



In an effort to boost trade efficiency and economic growth across the Pacific, the Oceania Customs Organisation (OCO), in partnership with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), is leading an initiative to streamline customs procedures. A recent workshop focused on Business Process Re-engineering (BPR) brought together key stakeholders to identify and implement strategies for simplifying essential cus-

tom processes. The initiative targets key areas such as:

Advance Rulings: Making it easier for businesses to obtain clear guidance on customs regulations.

Risk Management: Implementing more efficient risk assessment procedures to expedite legitimate trade.

Shipment Processing: Reducing bottlenecks and delays in the movement of goods.

By simplifying these processes, OCO aims to reduce the administrative burden on businesses, freeing up valuable time and resources for growth and development. This workshop was conducted under the **IMPACT** Project which is a project funded by European Union. The Gap Analysis for 15 PACP countries completed by OCO, in collaboration with UNCTAD, on customs-related World Trade Organisation Trade Facilitation Agreement was presented at the workshop. During the workshop, participants were given an opportunity to finalise Summary Action Plans developed from the Gap Analysis for their respective administrations.

Handling Chemical Weapon Threat

The Oceania Customs Organisation (OCO), in partnership with the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), concluded a regional conference aimed at enhancing customs control over the trade and transit of toxic chemicals.



Held in Port Vila, the conference addressed growing concerns over the potential misuse of dual-use chemicals and sought to bolster regional cooperation in preventing their diversion. Key priorities included:

Optimising customs procedures: Developing more effective methods for detecting and intercepting suspicious shipments.

Sharing best practices: Exchanging strategies for mitigating the risks associated with non-state actors acquiring these chemicals.

Enhancing regional cooperation: Strengthening information sharing and collaborative efforts among Oceania Customs Administrations. OCO remains dedicated to working with its partners to build a safer and more secure Oceania, where the threat of chemical weapons is effectively mitigated.

Rest in love, George

We mourn the loss of Pacific Islands Tax Administrations Association Head of Secretariat, Mr George Mow.

Mr Mow was one of the biggest supporters of the Oceania Customs Organisation.

We offer our sincere condolences to the PITAA family and to his young family. George will certainly be missed in the region.



UPCOMINGEVENTS

October
2024

Guam Modernisation Project—Final Report	30 Sept - 4 Oct
Pre-Conference & Bilateral Meeting with Guam CQA	20 - 25 Oct
ABF Trade Enforcement: Revenue Evasion Master Class	28 - 30 Oct
ICP & RC (virtual meeting)	30 Oct
JHoPS Workshop (virtual meeting)	TBC
GESI Action Plan—Module II	TBC

November
2024

OCO Steering Committee F2F (Qtr 2/2025) Meeting, Suva Fiji	06 Nov
OCO Staff Retreat (Team Building) & Christmas Event	08 – 10 Nov
Maritime Training and Regional Coordinator Forum/ Command and Control Training	18 - 22 Nov
ABF Trade Enforcement Leadership Seminar, Brisbane	TBC
HS Contact Points Meeting	TBC
Conduct TRS in FSM, RMI, Palau, & Timor Leste	TBC
GESI Action Plan—Launch of Community of Practice - Module III	TBC

December
2024

ISWG Quarter 2/2025 Meeting	TBC
OCO Christmas Office Closure Period	Dec

GALLERY



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