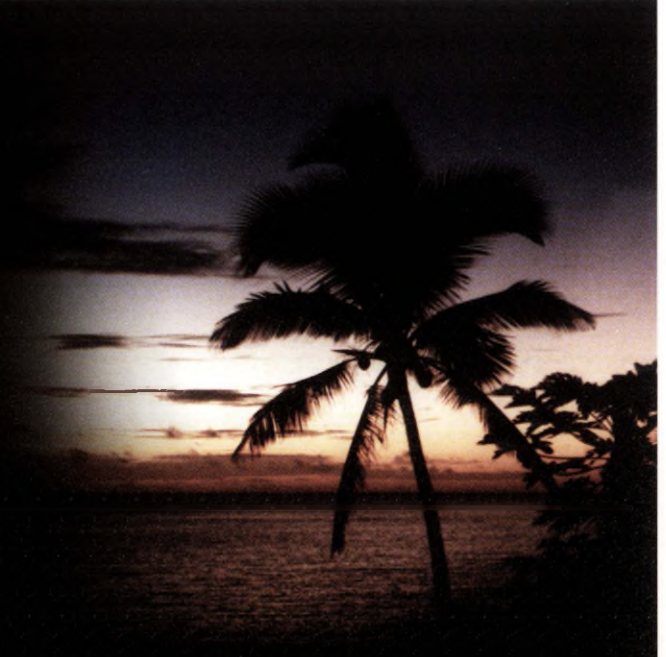


Oceania Customs Organisation



In August this year, 18 customs administrations gathered on the Pacific island nation of Niue to attend the inaugural annual conference of a new regional customs body, developed to foster cooperation and effectiveness in all aspects of customs administrations in Oceania.

The Oceania Customs Organisation – the OCO – has 23 members: American Samoa, Australia, Cook Islands, Fiji Islands, French Polynesia, Guam, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Norfolk Island, Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and Wallis and Futuna.

The OCO succeeds the Customs Heads of Administration Regional Meeting, CHARM, formed in 1986, and has been structured to meet the challenges of the new millennium. The OCO mission places particular emphasis on the needs of developing administrations.

The conference successfully set out broad directives for the OCO, defined in a

Charter. A strategic plan and annual work plan were also addressed at the conference proposing objectives on issues surrounding trade facilitation, revenue collection, law enforcement, human resource development and communication.

Australian Customs has agreed to host the OCO Secretariat in Brisbane for the next three years under the direction of a newly appointed OCO Head of Secretariat, John Marks. The Secretariat will coordinate and undertake work on the key tasks outlined in the work plan, develop strong links to a range of organisations and generally serve the needs of its members.

Activities that have been outlined for the coming year include: the further development of the Customs Regional Intelligence Network (CRIN); assisting members with the implementation of the WTO Valuation Agreement; better informing members of the provisions of the revised Kyoto Convention; conducting training surveys and activities; and the establishment of an OCO website. This latter task has already been completed and the site can be visited at www.ocosec.com/

New Oceania Customs group formed

Twenty-three Pacific customs administrations, including Australia, have formed the Oceania Customs Organisation (OCO) to foster greater cooperation and effectiveness between members. The OCO's Head of Secretariat, John Marks, outlines its role and potential.

The OCO is the successor to CHARM (Customs Heads of Administration Regional Meeting), which was formed in 1986. The decision to establish OCO was made in Tonga in August 1998 at the 13th and last CHARM, members agreeing that it was time to restructure the body to meet the many challenges of the new millennium.

Members of OCO are American Samoa, Australia, Cook Islands, Fiji islands, French Polynesia, Guam, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Norfolk Island, Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and Wallis and Futuna.

In August 1999, 18 of these member administrations attended the inaugural annual conference of the new organisation in the Pacific island nation of Niue. The conference

approved a charter setting out the broad direction of OCO. Its mission is to promote efficiency and effectiveness in all aspects of customs administration in Oceania, with particular emphasis on the needs of developing administrations.

The conference agreed on a strategic plan and an annual work plan. These plans address a wide range of members' concerns and objectives, focusing on trade facilitation and revenue collection, law enforcement, human resource development and communication. Some activities scheduled for the coming year are:

- assist members to better understand and implement the World Trade Organization Valuation Agreement;
- inform members of the provisions of the revised Kyoto Convention and assist those seeking to accede or to implement procedures consistent with the revised convention;

- prepare a regional impact analysis on the proposed South Pacific Forum Free Trade Agreement;
- further development of OCO's Customs Regional Intelligence Network;
- stocktake of technology applications and proposed developments;
- develop a strategic risk assessment of threats to the region;
- conduct a training survey on needs and availability of resources;
- coordinate regional training activities;
- conduct a trial in an OCO member country of the integrity self-assessment process developed by the World Customs Organization;
- establish an OCO Internet web site; and
- participate in other regional and international forums and pass on benefits to members.

(Continued on the next page)

At the conference: (from left) Lola Rex, Director, Niue Tourism Office; Shaun Evans, Law Enforcement Liaison Officer, South Pacific Forum; Young Viviani, Deputy Premier, Niue.



OCO Head of Secretariat, John Marks, comes to the position with over 30 years experience in Customs. In the late 1980s he represented Australian Customs in Tokyo and in the early 1990s spent two years assisting Thai Customs in its role as Regional Representative of the World Customs Organization. For the past six years John has worked in the International Section at Customs headquarters in Canberra, dealing with customs bilateral issues, technical assistance and CHARM / OCO issues.

John will be assisted in the Secretariat by customs officers seconded from island members of OCO.



John Marks, OCO's Head of Secretariat.
The OCO adopted this striking logo at its 1999 Annual Conference

Australian Customs is very supportive of OCO and its objectives and has agreed to host the OCO Secretariat in Brisbane for the next three years. The secretariat will undertake work on key tasks under the work plan and will monitor progress and assist other key tasks being undertaken by OCO members. The secretariat is expected to develop strong links to a wide range of relevant regional and other international organisations, helping OCO to become a vital and proactive organisation, serving the needs of its members and the region.

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