



PERMANENT TECHNICAL
COMMITTEE

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-
241th/242th Sessions

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24 – 26 October 2023

Brussels, 05 September 2023

Green Customs

(Item V on the Agenda)

SUMMARY

Purpose of document

An initial WCO Green Customs Action Plan (GCAP) was presented to the 239th/240th Sessions of the Permanent Technical Committee (PTC). Taking into account the PTC guidance, a refined draft was presented and endorsed as a living document by the 88th Session of the Policy Commission. The PTC will be informed of the progress made in the implementation of the GCAP.

The 239th/240th Sessions of the PTC were updated of the progress of the Study Report on the implications for Customs administrations of the transition to a Circular Economy. The PTC will be informed of the publication of the Report.

The PTC will be informed of the Asia/Pacific Plastic Waste (APPW) Project final meeting that was held from 29 to 31 May 2023, on the margins of the 24th WCO Asia/Pacific Regional Heads of Customs Administrations Conference in Perth, Australia, bringing together representatives of the eight participating Customs administrations (Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam), as well as Australia as an observer and various international and regional partner organizations. Following the findings and recommendations of the APPW Project, one of the deliverables was the development of a Regional Action Plan (RAP), which outlines aims and proposed actions for the participating Members in the Project to advance and achieve a regional and more harmonized approach to managing plastic waste.

Actions required of the Permanent Technical Committee:

The PTC is invited to:

- take note of the updates to the Green Customs Action Plan;
- take note of the Study Report on the implications for Customs administrations of the transition to a Circular Economy; and
- take note of the outcomes of the Asia/Pacific Plastic Waste (APPW) Project

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I. Background

1. The Strategic Plan 2022-2025 has identified Green Customs as one of its focus areas, implying the need to step up efforts and enhance expertise in this matter.
2. The December 2022 Policy Commission concluded that the WCO needed to centralize its efforts and achievements within a dedicated Action Plan. The idea was to provide the WCO with a document that would set out a clear vision on what Customs could contribute to the global green agenda and provide some specific initial deliverables at the WCO.
3. An initial Green Customs Action Plan was therefore prepared by the Secretariat and presented to the 239th/240th Sessions of the Permanent Technical Committee (PTC). On the basis of the outcomes of the PTC discussions, the draft was further refined and endorsed as a living document by the 88th Session of the Policy Commission.
4. The progress made in the implementation of the GCAP is presented in Annex to this document.

II. Study on Circular Economy and the implications for Customs administrations

5. **Action 37 of** the GCAP aimed to Conduct research on Green Customs matters, and is related to the **Study on Circular Economy and the implications for Customs administrations**. It corresponds to **Action 4** in the Revised Permanent Technical Committee (PTC) Work Programme 2022-2025.
6. Following the updates presented at the 239th/240th Sessions of the PTC, the Study Report was published in June 2023 and it is available at the WCO website in [English](#) and [French](#).
7. The Study is organized into five chapters: the first chapter provides an overview of the concept of the circular economy, both in theory and in practice, to identify what Customs officers should know, but also to clarify a series of implications for Customs. The second chapter presents the links between international legislation (regional trade agreements) in relation to the circular economy. The Study highlighted three main challenges in this transition: the data of the circular economy (chapter 3), the facilitation of its trade and the enforcement of laws (chapter 4), seeking to highlight the potential role of Customs. Finally, a series of case studies are presented to synthesize the experience of the Customs field in relation to the circular economy.

III. Outcomes of the Asia/Pacific Plastic Waste (APPW) Project

8. Actions 20 and 21 of the GCAP (corresponding to Action 5 and 6 of the Revised Permanent Technical Committee (PTC) Work Programme 2022-2025) relate to the Development of a Regional Joint Action plan regarding border management of recyclable plastic materials and plastic waste within the framework of the Asia Pacific Plastic Waste (APPW) Project and to the organization of a Regional Workshop on border management of recyclable plastic materials and plastic waste, within the framework of the APPW Project. These two activities represent the final deliverables of the Project, that was conducted from 1 April 2020 to 30 June 2023 by the WCO Secretariat's Compliance and Facilitation Directorate and nine Member Administrations of the Asia-Pacific (A/P) region, with the financial support of the Government of Japan.
9. The APPW Project focused on strengthening the capacity of Customs administrations in the A/P region to prevent illegal trade in plastic waste and promote sustainable waste management practices, as well as facilitating the legal trade in plastic waste and scrap. In particular, the focus was placed on the implementation of the Basel Convention, specifically on matters related to plastic waste and the illegal shipment thereof, and the strengthening of a coordinated border management approach between Customs and the competent authorities under the Basel Convention.
10. During phase I, the APPW Project worked with the Customs administrations of Indonesia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam. For phase II, its scope was extended, Customs administrations from Cambodia, Lao PDR, Malaysia and Thailand joined the Project, and Australia was included as an observer. The selection of the Beneficiary Member administrations resulted from the analysis of the distribution of the volume of trade in plastic waste that followed China's import ban of most plastic waste in 2018.
11. The key objectives of the Project included:
 - **Capacity building:** To enhance the capacity of Customs administrations in the region to effectively enforce Customs and other environmental regulations related to the import and export of plastic waste.
 - **Streamlining and harmonization of Customs procedures:** To support the streamlining, harmonisation and digitalization of Customs procedures related to the import and export of plastic waste across the region to facilitate legal trade and prevent illegal activities.
 - **Information exchange:** To improve information exchange between Customs administrations as well as Customs-to-Customs and Custom-to-other government agencies cooperation in the region and with other countries to facilitate the detection, interdiction, and prevention of illegal trade in plastic waste.
12. The Project worked collaboratively with partner organizations, notably the Basel Convention Secretariat, the WCO-UNODC Container Control Programme, and the UNODC Unwaste Project, to ensure that capacity building efforts in areas of common interest were complementary and coordinated to achieve the expected outcomes for the Beneficiary Administrations.
13. The Project delivered various guidance materials that have been published on the APPW project [webpage](#), including a Self-Assessment Tool serving as a diagnostic instrument to monitor and check compliance with the Basel Convention, in particular the transboundary movements of plastic waste, in order to take relevant action. Also, other tools were developed or updated to address plastic waste, such as the Basel Convention section in the Environmental Guide for Frontline Customs Officers; a Training Framework for Customs administrations on plastic waste; and a new chapter on plastic waste in the WCO Coordinated Border Management Compendium (CBM), introducing the core elements of the Basel Convention.

14. As the final outcome of the Project, the participants approved the recommendations for the A/P region and laid them down in a Regional Action Plan (RAP), also available on the WCO website in [English](#) and [French](#), which was presented at the 24th WCO A/P Regional Heads of Customs Administrations (RHCA) Conference on 31 May 2023 in Perth, Australia. The RHCA Conference welcomed the outcomes of the Project and agreed to maintain the implementation of the RAP as a standing Agenda item for future WCO A/P RHCA meetings.
15. The actions foreseen under the RAP are structured around five main objectives, involving the recognition of the Customs administrations' role and responsibilities in the plastic waste trade:
 - a. Establish a sufficient mandate and legal basis for Customs administrations to assume their responsibility in the plastic waste trade;
 - b. Design a joint and uniform response to illegal trade in plastic waste, to avoid port hopping and evasive behaviour;
 - c. Reduce the administrative burden and clearance times and facilitate legal trade in plastic waste and scrap;
 - d. Strengthen Customs-to-Customs and Customs-to-Other Government Agencies cooperation and communication;
 - e. Awareness raising and capacity building support on the provisions and regulations related to plastic waste trade.
16. With the commitment of the A/P region to maintain the implementation of the RAP as a standing item for future WCO A/P RHCA meetings, the Customs administrations of the A/P region will have an opportunity to follow up on the recommendations of the RAP and on the risks and opportunities resulting from trade in plastic waste.
17. The regional approach, as well as the outcomes and tools of the APPW Project can be directly applied or used as a benchmark for other WCO regions and/or other waste streams, looking into practices regarding Customs-to-Customs and Customs-to-Other Government Agencies cooperation and communication.

IV. The PTC is invited to:

- take note of the updates to the Green Customs Action Plan;
- take note of the Study Report on the implications for Customs administrations of the transition to a Circular Economy; and
- take note of the outcomes of the Asia/Pacific Plastic Waste (APPW) Project.

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