



Participants at the recent MSG Subcommittee on Customs and Quarantine Meeting at the MSG Secretariat in Port Vila

The MSG Subcommittee on Customs and Quarantine (SCCQM) met for three days from Monday 18th March to Wednesday 20 March at the MSG Headquarters in Port Vila. The Meeting brought together senior officials from the Customs and Quarantine Departments of the MSG Countries. The aims of the Meeting were to review the implementation of the MSG Trade Agreement in goods and enhance the implementation of other non-tariff trade facilitative measures such as customs procedures and quarantine and biosecurity procedures.

In his opening statement to the Meeting the Acting Deputy Director General of the MSG Secretariat, Mr. Peni Sikivou made mention of the fact that over the last two years the Subcommittee had worked very hard to improve customs and quarantine procedures to promote MSG trade and significant achievements had been made. He stressed that the Subcommittee's role is significant to the MSG because Customs and Quarantine/Bio-security are on the frontline of the implementation of the MSGTA which involve the clearance of goods as well as the granting of preferential tariffs at the border. At the meeting of the Subcommittee in March 2012 the Subcommittee developed the Handbook on MSG Trade Agreement (MSGTA) Rules of Origin (ROO) which to help exporters/private sector in understanding the eligibility criteria for their products to qualify for preferences when trading under the MSGTA. The ROO Handbook was endorsed by the MSG Leaders at their Summit in late March 2012 in Suva, Fiji. He thanked and congratulated the Subcommittee for that work which was well recognised by Leaders.

Mr. Sikivou further stressed that this year, the MSG celebrates its 25th anniversary and the Members together with the Secretariat had a lot to celebrate, not only their existence but also their achievements. One significant achievement is that, from January 2013 three MSG members are trading duty free under the MSGTA, and these are Fiji, Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu with the exception of 3 products - sugar, salt and mackerel, for PNG. The Solomon Islands will continue to reduce its tariffs until 2017. Whilst the tariff implementation and phasing down of the negative list had dominated one end of the border issues, the implementation of the MSGTA ROO including the verification, certification and clearance process with a view to improving procedures and facilitation of clearance were equally important.

The Meeting addressed customs and quarantine clearance procedures and issues faced by customs agents and brokers, the application of the rules of origin (ROO) in the current MSGTA legal text as well as the proposed provisions relating to ROO and biosecurity in the newly redrafted MSGTA legal text such as the Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) measures and Technical Standards. The Meeting also discussed and finalized the proposed MSG Co-operation Framework on Quarantine and Bio-security as a basis for the MSG Quarantine and Biosecurity Officials to work together in addressing biosecurity and quarantine issues of common interest. In this connection the Subcommittee also noted with appreciation the contributions at the Meeting from the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) and the

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Pacific Horticulture and Agriculture Market Access (PHAMA) for their participation at the meeting.

In recognizing the importance of private sector issues and their concerns, the meeting also received the presentations from two customs agents and brokers from Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu. Their participation added value in learning from their experiences including the challenges they face at the border. Members recognized the need for Customs officials to better collaborate with them to improve clearance time and effectively increase trade activities between MSG countries.

Further detailed information on the outcome of the C&QSCM can be accessed from the Customs & Quarantine focal points or from the MSG Secretariat on email: msg.secretariat@msg.int

Authorized by the Acting Director General

MSG Secretariat
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