

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO SINGLE WINDOW DESIGN A DRIVING FORCE BEHIND PAPERLESS TRADING INITIATIVES

Update from the APEC Sub-Committee on Customs Procedures Single Window Working Group

Working under increased pressure to enhance border security and paperless reporting to government, customs administrations are seeking to implement initiatives to simplify, centralise and harmonise current processes to improve international interoperability that will support legitimate trade whilst maintaining effective border control.

International trade single window developments have been identified as a priority on the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) trade facilitation agenda. The APEC Sub-Committee on Customs Procedures (SCCP) Single Window Working Group together with subject matter experts, standards organisations and other relevant stakeholders from industry are working to support the realisation of the single window vision for the region.

The Single Window Working Group's aim is to deliver capacity building assistance to APEC economies to support the development of paperless integrated border management initiatives in the region. The group is also working to bring together the experience of APEC member economies by establishing a repository of pilot projects and proofs of concept thus enabling economies to publish their work and share experiences, results and lessons learnt. The repository will provide a valuable source of information not currently captured or available in a single location.

Promoting and supporting the development of paperless trading initiatives and use of international standards will lead to improvements in supply chain reporting, which will be of benefit to all APEC economies.

In response to the current financial crisis, we may see APEC economies take a more cautious approach to implementing large multi-agency change preferring to adopt a staged approach focussing on high priority areas that demonstrate greater need and solid return on investment for government and the private sector. The adoption of an incremental or staged approach combined with early identification of the longer term intent would assist in developing a solid foundation that could accommodate subsequent expansion.

In 2008 in Lima, Peru, at the Twentieth APEC Ministerial Meeting, the APEC Ministers released a Joint Statement. In that statement the Ministers 'instructed officials to work towards the implementation of international trade "Single Windows" across APEC using recognized international instruments and standards to enhance interoperability of trade systems' and 'reinforced the importance of a strategic, goal-orientated and multi-year approach to capacity-building that assists APEC economies achieve the Bogor Goals'.

The Single Window Working Group's capacity building efforts are in harmony with this Joint Statement and support the efforts of APEC economies in reducing trade transaction costs by an additional five per cent by 2010.

The opportunity for innovation inevitably brings with it a number of challenges. This is evident in efforts to create a roadmap and implementation strategy to guide APEC economies towards achieving the single window vision. All member economies operate within a unique environment and are looking for a flexible approach to the design, build and implementation of single window systems.

Despite the challenges, there are a number of important benefits to be realised from a collaborative effort and exchange of ideas including the opportunity to establish global partnerships to facilitate paperless trading, a shared understanding of aims and objectives, identification of differences and alignments, exploration of opportunities for international interoperability, early advice of overseas developments, the promotion of a whole-of-government approach and the establishment of a shared vision and development pathway for single windows.

In Sydney in April 2007, the newly-formed Single Window Working Group invited a wide range of stakeholders to contribute to the formation of an APEC Single Window Strategic Plan and Development Report, subsequently published in 2007. The workshop created positive momentum, providing a solid foundation for future cooperation, and industry representatives were appreciative of the opportunity to provide input into future trade-related developments.

The final workshop, to be held in Singapore in April 2009, will showcase the outcomes relating to the six recommendations outlined in the Single Window Strategic Plan. At this final workshop, member economies and industry will once again be invited to contribute their comments and ideas on the draft version of the final deliverable prior to its presentation for endorsement at the second meeting of the Sub-Committee on Customs Procedures in July 2009.

The delivery of this final report will conclude Phase 2 of the Single Window Working Group and the group's term. The exchange of ideas at the April workshop in Singapore will contribute to the discussion regarding the potential continuation of the working group and identification of possible future objectives.

Further information can be obtained by contacting APECSWWG@customs.gov.au