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PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM

**PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM SECRETARIAT
REGIONAL TRADE FACILITATION STRATEGY
FOR THE PACIFIC ISLAND COUNTRIES
VIRTUAL WORKSHOP
10-12 November 2021**

OUTCOMES DOCUMENT

The Workshop for the Regional Trade Facilitation Strategy for The Pacific Island Countries was convened virtually on 10-12 November 2021. The meeting was co-organized between Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat and the Work Bank Group. The meeting was moderated by Ambassador Barrett Salato, Trade Commissioner of the Solomon Islands, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade (day 1), Ms. Laisiana Tugaga, Pacer PLUS Implementation Unit (day 2), and Mr. Noah Patrick Kouback, Programme Adviser (Trade) of the Pacific Island Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) (day 3), and attended by government and private sector representatives from Australia, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, New Zealand, Niue, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu .

2. The workshop was also attended by representatives of the following international and regional organisations, and donor partners World Bank Group, CARICOM, Pacific Community, Oceania Customs Organisation (OCO), Pacer PLUS Implementation Unit (PPIU), Malaysia, Spain, United Kingdom, and United States. The List of Participants is **attached** as [Annex 1](#).

DAY 1

OFFICIAL OPENING

3. In his opening remarks Dr Filimon Manoni, the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS)'s Deputy Secretary General, reflected upon the importance of trade facilitation, and recalled the steps undertaken to promote this initiative, including the October 2020 Regional Trade Facilitation Workshop and the ministerial decision to consider and develop the Pacific Regional Trade Facilitation Strategy. Dr Manoni's remarks are available at [here](#).

4. In his opening remarks, Mr. Lasse Melgaard, Regional Representative to the South Pacific, World Bank Group (WBG) emphasized that the WBG is very pleased to be supporting the development, and implementation of this Regional Trade Facilitation Strategy in partnership with PIFS, which builds on the existing strong partnerships in the region between the WBG, development partners and regional organizations. He further indicated that the Pacific Regional Trade Facilitation Strategy will provide a roadmap to improve trade competitiveness and create both regional opportunities and country specific-action plans.



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5. In his opening remarks, Hon. Faiyaz Koya, Fiji's Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport; and Chair of the Forum Trade Ministers Meeting, welcomed all participants to the workshop and reaffirmed the need for a trade facilitation strategy, as this would be key to boosting market access and strengthening value chains to keep essential goods circulating by reducing time and cost bound across borders, saving lives in time or emergency, boosting competitiveness of the Pacific region. Minister's Koya's remarks are available [here](#).

SETTING THE SCENE

6. Mr Bill Gain, Global Lead, Trade Facilitation, Customs Reform & Border Management, WBG, provided an overview of trade facilitation in the Forum Island Countries and of the need for a Regional Trade Facilitation Strategy. Mr Gain indicated that the World Bank Group (WBG) has been supporting the Pacific Islands to improve trade competitiveness and drive economic diversification. Support for this initiative is provided by the WBG's Trade Facilitation Support Program (TFSP), which provides assistance to countries seeking to align their trade practices with the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA). The TFSP is funded by nine donor partners: Australia, Canada, the European Commission, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United States, and the United Kingdom. He further stated that economic growth and sustained development progress will require long-term cooperation between governments, international development partners and regional organizations. A regional strategy is intended, through collective action, to reduce time and cost that would otherwise be incurred by individual PIF members implementing trade facilitation measures on their own and promotes closer integration of PIF community through harmonized, agreed approaches to implementation of trade facilitation measures. The Pacific Regional Trade Facilitation Strategy will provide a roadmap to improve trade competitiveness and create both regional opportunities and country specific-action plans.

DEFINITIONS, MAIN ELEMENTS

7. Mr Brian O'Shea, PIFS/WBG Trade Facilitation Expert, presented on Definitions of Regional Trade Facilitation Strategy, Benefits and Challenges. He presented the concept of a regional trade facilitation strategy, its main elements and benefits, and, based on the 2014 Framework for Pacific Regionalism, the different forms of regional action that might be included.

COUNTRY PRESENTATIONS

8. Representatives from Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, and Niue presented their responses to Section 1 of the Pacific Trade Facilitation survey administered by the WBG - *Your Country's Trade Facilitation Situation*". Country presentations are **attached** as Annex 2.

9. After a summary of the day by Mr Brian O'Shea, the Moderator Ambassador Barret Salato thanked participants and adjourned the meeting to the following day.



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DAY 2

COUNTRY PRESENTATIONS

10. After a brief introduction and a summary of previous day's presentations, representatives from New Zealand, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu, presented their responses to Section 1 of the Pacific Trade Facilitation survey administered by the WBG - *Your Country's Trade Facilitation Situation*". Country presentations are **attached** as Annex 2.

LESSONS FROM THE CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY (CARICOM)

11. Ms Michele Lowe, Coordinator for Hemispheric and Bilateral Negotiations, CARICOM Secretariat, provided lessons from the Caribbean Community by illustrating examples of regional implementation of trade facilitation reforms in the context of the WTO Agreement on Trade Facilitation (TFA). Ms Lowe shared that CARICOM was seeking to leverage implementation of the TFA to support and catalyse regional integration through the adoption of co-ordinated and harmonised trade facilitation reforms across its Member States. She stressed that a regional approach to trade facilitation reforms had the potential to significantly reduce intra-regional trade costs; enhance productive synergies; strengthen regional value chains and increase the region's attractiveness and competitiveness to interested investors. She had also stressed the importance of political will, private sector involvement and prioritization to facilitate what areas are feasible to be implemented in a timely and effective manner. These priorities are listed in the Category C list of commitment.

12. After a summary of the day by Mr Brian O'Shea, the Moderator Ms. Laisiana Tugaga thanked participants and adjourned the meeting to the following day.

DAY 3

PROPOSED OUTLINE FOR THE PACIFIC REGIONAL TRADE FACILITATION STRATEGY

13. After a summary of the past two days, Mr Brian O'Shea, PIFS/WBG Trade Facilitation Expert, presented a proposed outline for the Pacific Regional Trade Facilitation Strategy, including: (1) Scope and Priority measures; (2) Regional Activities to support implementation of priority measures.

14. Mr O'Shea noted in particular that, the intention of the Pacific Regional Trade Facilitation strategy, as set out in the Pacific Aid for Trade Strategy 2020-2025 (PAFTS), is to support Forum Island Countries in their implementation of trade facilitation aspects of existing trade agreements, such as the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, PICTA, PACER Plus and the Pacific- EU Economic Partnership Agreement. Mr. O'Shea suggested that the focus of the strategy should be those trade facilitation measures in those agreements for which Forum Island Countries have indicated a need for external technical assistance through, for example, their notifications to the WTO, and encourage Members who are yet to submit their responses to the survey to do so. He suggested that consideration also should be given to use the Strategy to support closely related Pacific regional initiatives, notably the implementation of the Pacific Regional E-commerce Strategy and Roadmap that was endorsed by Forum Members in August



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2021. Based on those criteria and considerations, Mr. O’Shea identified approximately 20 trade facilitation measures that appear to be common priorities for Forum Island Countries. He then reviewed with participants various specific regional actions that would support the implementation of these priority measures, such as development of model legislation, standard operating procedures and technical guides for national implementation; establishment of regional committees and technical support mechanisms; implementation of regional processes and systems for regional Government to Government (G2G) information exchange; harmonization of legislation and procedures; and legal and administrative integration. He asked that participants review and provide feedback on these proposals and suggest any alternatives or additions.

PROPOSED WAY FORWARD

15. The meeting approved the following way forward for the development of the Pacific Regional Trade Facilitation Strategy:

- Forum Island Countries will complete and return the Pacific Island Regional Trade Facilitation pre-workshop survey as soon as possible, if they have not already done so;
- National virtual consultations will be scheduled as needed during November 2021 – March 2022, to further expand, collect and review the foregoing inputs and obtain national agreement;
- Based on inputs received from the workshop, surveys, and national virtual consultations, the World Bank will develop an initial draft regional strategy, which will be reviewed and cleared by the PIFS before submission to Members;
- A follow up validation workshop to review and finalize the Pacific Regional Trade Facilitation Strategy will take place by the second quarter 2022, with aim of final submission for consideration to the 2022 Forum Trade Officials and Ministers Meetings.

CLOSING REMARKS

16. In her concluding remarks Alina Antoci, Senior Private Sector Development Specialist, World Bank Group, noted that the outcomes from the workshop are an important first step in developing the Pacific Regional Trade Facilitation strategy which is critical to leverage trade facilitation initiatives across all Forum Island Countries to enhance competitiveness for the region by easing access to regional and global markets.

17. In his concluding remarks Mr. Zarak Khan, Director Programmes and Initiatives of PIFS noted the existing strong partnership in the region between the World Bank, development partners and regional organisations towards development of the Strategy. Furthermore, in order to fast-track implementation, he reiterated the importance of political will, prioritisation, and private sector involvement. He reiterated the invite to Members which have yet to do so to complete the country questionnaire and encouraged all to play an active role in the consultations which will take place between November 2021 and March 2022. This will be crucial to deliver a robust first draft of Regional Trade Facilitation Strategy which will offer the Blue Pacific a valuable path towards economic recovery from COVID-19 pandemic.



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ANNEX 1 – LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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