

Integrity—Customs perspective

By Clay Kerswell

Integrity, whether it is described as ethics, governance or corruption, is a prominent issue in society, from politics to sport. Today, the community expects a higher level of integrity from public officials than ever before

Integrity is a key issue for all public sector administrations. Customs is aware that the international community's attention on this issue often focuses on Customs administrations—they are, after all, government agencies with responsibility for administering crucial functions linked to economic stability and development.

For the Australian Customs Service integrity is more than just not being corrupt. It extends to meeting the service standards expected by our clients and stakeholders and ensuring requirements are simplified. Australian Customs strives to ensure its actions are transparent. This assists in demystifying customs requirements and simplifying transactions.

Effectively marketing initiatives to its clients that promote integrity is given emphasis within Australian Customs. It is undertaking an integrity self-assessment of the organisation.

In addition, Australian Customs has been active in the promotion of integrity initiatives internationally, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region providing resources to assist other countries. Australian Customs maintains a leading role in the Oceania Customs Organisation and Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation Sub-Committee on Customs Procedures integrity committees.

Australia's continued efforts has seen integrity elevated to the workplans of all regional customs forums.

Focus on integrity

In November 1997 the Asia-Pacific Region of the World Customs Organisation (WCO) began to focus on the subject of integrity. A Regional Integrity Working Group chaired by Australia was formed and tasked with developing an Integrity Self Assessment Guide to help address the above concerns. The first draft of the Guide was developed based on the 12 points outlined in the WCO Arusha Declaration. The guide, together with the Declaration, now forms the basis of the WCO's anti-corruption and integrity strategy. Australia, as a member of the regional integrity working group, continues to contribute to the WCO integrity initiatives.

The WCO through its Human Resources Development Secretariat is responsible for conducting Integrity Workshops for member administrations. These workshops provide Customs Senior Managers with the theoretical and practical knowledge to both undertake integrity self-assessments of their organisations and to conduct similar in-house workshops for their own staff.

Australia has hosted two regional workshops based on this format, one in 1999 and the other in Brisbane in April 2001.

The Asia-Pacific region is also developing supplementary material to be made available to WCO members that will support the self-assessment process.



Progress

Progress is also being achieved in the APEC forum. At the second APEC Sub Committee on Customs Procedures (SCCP) meeting held in 1999 the inclusion of integrity in the group's action plan was overwhelmingly endorsed.

In 2000, Australia developed and tabled a detailed work program for integrity. The paper, supported by APEC leaders and Ministers, forms the basis of the project now being undertaken.

Strategy

In 1999 the Oceania Customs Organisation (OCO) agreed that integrity should be a key focus for the group and it was subsequently included in its Strategic Plan. A preliminary task for the OCO Secretariat was to identify participants for a two-country trial of the Integrity Self Assessment process.

In March 2000 it was agreed that all members would complete the self-assessment process. The OCO members agreed to adopt the same approach to implementing integrity as that adopted by the APEC sub-committee.

Fighting corruption

The First Global Forum on Fighting Corruption was hosted by then US Vice President Al Gore in Washington from 24–26 February 1999. In accordance with the declaration adopted during the conference, the Netherlands Government will host the Second Global Forum from 28-31 May 2001.

Five key themes will be addressed during the Forum:

- integrity and good governance
- law enforcement
- customs

- development cooperation
- business community.

It is expected that the main outcome of the Forum will be the adoption of a Ministerial Declaration which will focus on two key suggestions for the future. The first of these will be the identification of a number of key elements or building blocks which may form the basis of a new global convention or instrument on corruption, under the auspices of the UN. The second will be the development and implementation of a mechanism for regional peer review and monitoring of national integrity strategies and efforts.

The recommendations that are put forward from the Customs workshop may have a significant influence on the final form of both the proposed integrity convention and integrity monitoring system.

The Region is also assisting the WCO Secretariat prepare for the Second Global Forum. The Customs workshop will include regional speakers from the US, Japan, Hong Kong and China. Australia will be represented at the forum by our Deputy Chief Executive Officer Border John Drury.

Commitment

Addressing integrity plays a key role in modernising and reforming Customs administrations, with regional member administrations recognising the importance of improving integrity and identifying and dealing with issues which may arise within their organisations.

An indication of the commitment to improve the perceptions of Customs administrations throughout the world has made integrity a primary focus of regional meetings over the past decade.

The World Customs Organisation (WCO) 'Arusha Declaration'

In 1993 participating members of the Customs Co-operation Council (CCC), now WCO, met in Arusha, Tanzania, and developed a 12-point strategy, now known as the *Arusha Declaration*, to improve integrity and to identify, prevent and effectively deal with corruption and corruption related issues within Customs administrations.

The declaration:

- Minimum administrative regulation
- Transparency
- Automation
- Strategic segregation, rotation and relocation
- Management responsibility and accountability
- Auditing and internal investigation
- Morale and organisational culture
- Recruitment and selection
- Code of conduct
- Professional development
- Adequate remuneration
- Relationship with brokers and industry.