

IFAC I - CUSTOMS

*Jim Clawson, Chairman
1620 I Street, NW
Washington, DC 20006
Tel. 202 463-8493
Fax. 202 463-8497
Int: jclawson@moinc.com*

February 21, 2003

The Honorable Robert B. Zoellick
United States Trade Representative
600 17th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20508

The Honorable Donald Evans
Secretary
Department of Commerce
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Ambassador Zoellick and Secretary Evans:

Pursuant to Section 2104 (e) of the Trade Act of 2002 and Section 135 (e) of the Trade Act of 1974, as amended, I am pleased to transmit the report of the Industry Functional Advisory Committee on Customs Matters (IFAC I) on the U.S.- Singapore Free Trade Agreement, reflecting our consensus advisory opinion on the proposed Agreement.

The major objectives of the Committee have been met in this agreement. We wish to thank those in your offices who have made the extra effort to keep our committee advised of developments as the negotiations progressed. It is a pleasure to work with them on these customs issues because the results in the agreement demonstrate that our views and opinions were heard and taken into consideration. While there are so many that we cannot list them in this letter, we wish to give particular thanks to Matt Rohde and Katherine Wiehagen.

Sincerely,

James B. Clawson

James B. Clawson
Chair
IFAC I

Enclosure

The U.S.-Singapore Free Trade Agreement (FTA)

**Report of the
Industry Functional Advisory Committee on Customs Matters
(IFAC I)**

February 2003

IFAC I - CUSTOMS

February 21, 2003

Industry Functional Advisory Committee on Customs Matters (IFAC I)

IFAC I Advisory Committee Report to the President, the Congress and the United States Trade Representative on the U.S. – Singapore Free Trade Agreement

I. Purpose of the Committee Report

Section 2104 (e) of the Trade Act of 2002 requires that advisory committees provide the President, the U.S. Trade Representative, and Congress with reports required under Section 135 (e)(1) of the Trade Act of 1974, as amended, not later than 30 days after the President notifies Congress of his intent to enter into an agreement.

Under Section 135 (e) of the Trade Act of 1974, as amended, the report of the Advisory Committee for Trade Policy and Negotiations and each appropriate policy advisory committee must include an advisory opinion as to whether and to what extent the agreement promotes the economic interests of the United States and achieves the applicable overall and principle negotiating objectives set forth in the Trade Act of 2002.

The report of the appropriate sectoral or functional committee must also include an advisory opinion as to whether the agreement provides for equity and reciprocity within the sectoral or functional area.

Pursuant to these requirements, IFAC I hereby submits the following report.

II. Executive Summary of Committee Report

The Committee reviewed that part of the agreement that covers customs procedures or is otherwise required to be administered by the customs administrations of the parties. The Committee has not reviewed or commented on the other provisions in the agreement such as the agriculture and non-agriculture market access provisions. The Committee found the agreement to be fair and balanced. It provides many benefits to U.S. traders. As a result of these positive provisions, the Committee believes the agreement does provide equity and reciprocity in the customs functional area.

III. Brief Description of the Mandate of IFAC I

The Industry Functional Advisory Committee (IFAC) on Customs Matters is concerned with all aspects of the process of importing and exporting goods through customs services, both domestic and foreign, and, with facilitation of the movement of such goods into and out of customs.

Industry representatives serving on the Customs IFAC provide advice on trade policy matters. Recently, members of the Customs IFAC have provided advice on a range of issues that

IFAC I - CUSTOMS

included: the Preshipment Inspection Agreement, the Agreement on Rules of Origin, the Import Licensing Agreement, the Harmonized System Committee in the World Customs Organization (WCO), and intellectual property enforcement. The committee provided recommendations on the operations and implementation of the Customs Valuation Agreement, and advised concerning implementation of the Information Technology Agreement (ITA) and ITA II and the resolution of remaining classification issues. Members of the Customs IFAC also helped realize a satisfactory conclusion to the product specific rules of origin work program currently underway in the WCO and the WTO. Another area of emphasis for the committee was customs related provisions and trade facilitation measures in the Transatlantic Business Dialogue (TABD), the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), and the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA) Agreements. Members of the Customs Committee also worked on WTO trade facilitation efforts and initiatives for a new round of trade negotiations, international trade data systems, and customs automation in the U.S. customs service and the need for improved U.S. customs processing systems.

Industry representatives serving on the Industry Functional Advisory Committee on Customs Matters have a voice in U.S. trade policy formulation through the Industry Consultations Program (ICP), which emerged from the 1974 Trade Act; to ensure that trade negotiators were coordinating with the private sector during trade negotiations. Based on the program's success, the ICP was renewed and expanded by the Trade Agreements Act of 1979 and the Trade and Competitiveness Act of 1988. The Department of Commerce, the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR), and other agencies work side-by-side with business leaders who serve as advisors to the U.S. Government. The Department of Commerce and USTR have joint responsibility for operating the Advisory Committees of the ICP.

IV. Negotiating Objectives and Priorities of (Committee)

While a number of areas were negotiated as part of the U.S. – Singapore Free Trade agreement that could have customs implications, there were several principal objectives of the Committee. The functions of the import process and how it is administered can make the agreement more successful for the benefit of traders or it can maintain technical barriers to that trade. Another objective was to ensure that the rules and regulations are transparent and understandable to all traders including small and medium sized enterprises. We also wished to ensure that the agreement included a mechanism to keep those best practices for import and export current.

To provide advice on these objectives the Committee commented on the following issues:

A. Adherence by Singapore to existing customs conventions including:

- Harmonized Commodity Coding System (HS)
- WTO Agreement on Customs Valuation
- ATA Carnet
- Rules of Origin Agreement
- Drawback
- Pre-shipment Inspection Agreement
- Trade Facilitation

- B. Use of electronic import processing including use of electronic certification of origin.
- C. Adoption of clear and transparent rules of origin for determining eligibility of products for preference with an appeal process.
- D. Mechanisms to keep customs rules updated and current with best practices.

V. Advisory Committee Opinion on Agreement

With experience from the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the work underway in the Free Trade Agreement for the Americas (FTAA), the customs sections of the Singapore agreement are an improvement from the previous agreements. The U.S. negotiators met regularly with the Committee and solicited advice. They were responsive to the unsolicited advice from the Committee as well. From the results included in the Agreement it is apparent that the negotiators accepted the Committee's advice and sought to achieve all of the objectives of the Committee. There are a couple of areas where the customs provisions did not meet the objectives such as requiring adherence to the Harmonized System Convention but on balance, the agreement provides equity and reciprocity in the customs areas.

The following is a more detailed description of some of the customs provisions that the Committee believes our negotiators were successful in reaching the objectives of the Committee.

▪ **General Provisions**

The Committee reviewed the customs section of the agreement and is pleased that so many of the current best practices have been included in those provisions. From the 48 hour release of goods standard to the need to make the rules and procedures available to the public, the lists of agreed to practices implements many of the international customs guidelines.

▪ **Definitions**

The definitions section provides clear and beneficial descriptions for the terms, Waste and scrap; Used goods; Recovered goods; and especially Remanufactured products.

▪ **Rules of Origin**

The Committee reviewed this section for process, not application of the rules. Determination if the application of the rules meets the objectives of that sector is left to each sector. For process, the origin sections provide for clear rules, ability to request advance rulings, and an avenue for appeal of that ruling. The Committee was pleased that the administrative provisions are robust enough to prohibit illegal transshipment and ensure the benefits of the agreement apply only to originating products. The general provisions also provide a mechanism to update those rules as needed.

▪ **Certification of Origin**

The negotiators were able to obtain much improved provisions for the handling of certificates of origin. Certification of eligibility is good for 4 years, can be provided electronically, and the burden is on the importer to make the certification.

▪ **Customs Valuation**

Under the customs value section the negotiators were again able to achieve the Committee's objectives. Singapore must use the transaction value under the World Trade Organization definition of customs value, the definition of software meets the needs of business. The value of software will be determined by the value of the carrier media, which is a significant benefit, and there are strong provisions for advance rulings and appeals.

▪ **Dispute Resolution**

The Dispute Resolution procedure in the Singapore Agreement appears to be workable. The Chile agreement however does provide greater flexibility in the panel provision. Article 7 of the Chilean Agreement provides for a roster of twenty (20) panelists, six (6) of whom are non-party nationals. This creates a reasonably good pool from which to select the panelists who will be called upon to resolve disputes. Article 20.4 of the Singapore Agreement in Paragraph 4 (b) establishes a contingent list of only five (5) panelists who will act as neutrals – other panelists being selected by the parties subject to the approval of the other party. The contingent list of five (5) appears to be too small. Just normal principles of availability could cause difficulties and just at the wrong time. Otherwise the procedures in both agreements are good.

▪ **Trade Facilitation**

The Committee is pleased that the agreement includes trade facilitation provisions. Trade facilitation is mainly directed to procedures and associated information flows that control the international movement of goods and means of payment. With the assistance of improved information technologies, market forces have effected improvements in commercial procedures in recent years. However, obstacles continue to prevent and delay the efficient movement of goods and means of payment across borders, especially in the area of Customs' applications.

The Committee believes that trade facilitation is an absolutely essential ingredient of trade negotiations, and even more so in the light of the recent dramatic downturn in the global economy. Trade facilitation provisions should be focused on the simplification and harmonization of Customs procedures and practices. The process should be transparent and predictable. They should also require Parties to maintain appropriate measures to ensure efficient and fair Customs facilitation of goods that are imported and/or exported by express delivery services suppliers. The agreement's provisions do that. However, we are disappointed with the agreement's inclusion of a six-hour target for release of express shipments; we would urge that future agreements aim to cut that target at least in half.

▪ **Other Provisions**

Other provisions such as Drawback, Alteration and Repair, User Fees, Import Pricing and Licensing all have met the objectives of the Committee.

VI. Membership of Committee

Mr. James Clawson

Ms. Houda Nounou

Ms. Marietta Bernot

IFAC I - CUSTOMS

Mr. Michael Lane
Mr. Robert Leo, Esquire
Mr. John McGovern
Mr. Selig (Sandy) Merber, Esquire
Ms. Susan Presti
Mr. Lauren Rachlin, Esquire
Mr. Gilbert Lee Sandler, Esquire
Ms. Marjorie Shostak
Ms. Evelyn Suarez, Esquire
Mr. George Weise