



# JAMAICA CUSTOMS: 'ENGAGING TRADITIONAL AND NEW PARTNERS WITH PURPOSE'

'CUSTOMS ENGAGING traditional and New Partners with Purpose' is the theme for International Customs Day (ICD) 2024. The theme serves to highlight key areas of focus for members of the World Customs Organisation (WCO), and firmly sets their sights on meeting the demands of the current environment by reassessing their engagement strategies with existing and potential partners. This includes making adjustments where necessary, deepening and expanding existing partnerships, forging new alliances and pivoting to meet the needs of Customs in the 21st century.

The universal importance of Customs becomes especially evident when examined through the lens of their role in national development. Worldwide, Customs plays a pivotal role in their country's development, through facilitating legitimate trade, protection of their borders and society and collecting revenue due. The Jamaica Customs Agency (JCA) currently collects approximately 38 per cent of Jamaica's revenue, serving as a linchpin and key enabler in achieving the objectives of the government.

Under the auspice of this year's theme, the WCO has outlined six (6) key calls to action, forming a

roadmap for Customs to follow, as new challenges such as rapid advances in technology, environmental and health crises and complex geopolitical shifts coalesce to create an ever-shifting dynamic to keep abreast of. The calls to action include enhancing engagement with traditional partners; forging new partnerships; collaborating with purpose; increasing diversity and inclusivity in engagements; assessing impact and adjusting strategies; and leveraging technology and data.

These key cross-cutting areas are all areas that the JCA has placed strategic focus on, and will continue to do so, as the Agency keeps making strides in achieving its objective of being a leading, modern Customs administration. Here's a look at some of the key initiatives designed to keep our stakeholders in focus, while achieving the objectives of the Agency.

## ENHANCING TRADITIONAL PARTNERSHIPS & LEVERAGING TECHNOLOGY

The JCA, acknowledging the impact that deliberate engagement can have on building awareness, fostering compliance and facilitating legitimate trade, has historically engaged with

traditional partners, through various initiatives and modalities that have evolved over time to suit the current environment. Typically, these partners include traders, customs brokers, freight forwarders, couriers, and other border regulatory agencies. While there is no denying the importance of human interaction, Information & Communication Technology (ICT) has featured strongly in how and when the Agency interacts with our stakeholders. These engagements have facilitated a smooth flow of information between the Agency and key stakeholders, while providing a robust feedback mechanism, thus allowing these relationships to flourish. Some of these ICT-related initiatives include:

### CONTACTLESS CLEARANCE

Traditionally clients would be required to go to the port to effect clearance of their barrels and other less than container load (LCL) shipments. This resulted in persistent and frequent complaints about long wait times, congestion, and the complexity of the process. The JCA heard the cries of our clients and developed and implemented "Contactless Clearance" as one of the solutions. This solution allows

the clearance of non-commercial LCL shipments without the presence of the importer. This has meant a simpler, hassle-free process for our clients clearing specified types of shipments and eliminates the need for them to be present at the port. It also means greater efficiencies for the JCA, as declarations can be processed in a more uniform and timely manner, thus helping to alleviate backlog.

### JACUSTOMS CONNECT (JCA MOBILE APP)

The JCA's Mobile App has been developed to facilitate ease of process and information flow from Customs to our clients and vice versa. It facilitates their interaction with Customs in one easy-to-use App, with features such as the Duty Estimator and Track and Trace which provide real time information about their shipments. It also facilitates real-time online payment, taking out the guess work and helping to demystify Customs processes.

### ELECTRONIC PASSENGER DECLARATION (C5)

The JCA and the Passport, Immigration & Citizenship Agency (PICA) have collaborated to develop and implement the Electronic Passenger Declaration, eliminating its paper-based predecessor. There is no longer a need to fill out paper forms, simply complete your passenger declaration form (C5) online at [enterjamaica.com](http://enterjamaica.com), for a faster, smoother and more transparent process.

### BODY-WORN CAMERAS

In a nod to the benefits of technology and the need to have accurate recordings of the Agency's

transactions with our clients, the JCA has introduced the use of body-worn cameras by Customs officers on the ports and some officers in the Border Protection Unit. The initiative is expected to provide a more accurate record of the encounter with our stakeholders, increase transparency and improve the quality of evidence collected.

Mrs Velma Ricketts Walker, CEO/Commissioner, in underscoring the benefits of the use of body-worn cameras, has noted they will allow the Agency to "fully embrace greater accountability and transparency in our operations, interactions and engagements with our importing and exporting public, as well as our passengers," thereby helping to build public trust.

### AUTOMATED SYSTEM FOR CUSTOMS DATA (ASYCUDA WORLD)

ASYCUDA is the JCA's automated system for Customs data which allows traders and/or their authorised agents to submit import and export declarations, manifests and pay online. While it is not a new initiative, the agency continues to maintain and expand our functionalities to meet the needs of both internal and external clients.

### JAMAICA SINGLE WINDOW FOR TRADE (JSWIFT)

JSWIFT is an electronic platform (web-based portal), which allows traders to submit transactional information through a single access point. It provides support for regulatory requirements for cross border trade in Jamaica, allowing for the electronic application for licences, permits, certificates and other regulatory requirements and their processing by the relevant cross-border

regulatory authorities (CBRAs). The initiative has been well received, as it has reduced transaction time and cost, no longer requiring travelling between CBRAs and Customs to facilitate processing. To date, ten (10) CBRAs have been onboarded.

### RETURNING RESIDENTS' ONLINE PORTAL

The JCA is cognisant of the challenges that can be presented by the varied geographical location of our clients globally, and their need to access Customs information and personnel. To this end the Agency has delivered a worthy solution in the form of our Returning Residents' Online Portal. The Portal allows clients to register and apply for their returning residents' entitlement, even while overseas via the Agency's website at [www.jacustoms.gov.jm](http://www.jacustoms.gov.jm).

### ONLINE VALUATION VERIFICATION & LIVE CHAT SERVICES

The Online Valuation Verification Service is another of the JCA's innovative solutions aimed at allowing better communication and flow of information with our clients. It allows the client to settle their valuation concerns and is facilitated through the Agency's Live Chat Service via [www.jacustoms.gov.jm](http://www.jacustoms.gov.jm).

### INCREASING DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVITY THROUGH EFFECTIVE USE OF SOCIAL AND TRADITIONAL MEDIA

The JCA serves not only our traditional importing and exporting community, but rather the entire nation of Jamaica. Bearing this in mind, the Agency has undertaken a number of initiatives utilising traditional media, such as our radio feature "Inside Customs", but has scanned the current environment and recognised the need for diversification. This has resulted in increased use of social media and other online forums to reach our customers where they are. The Agency now employs the use of a YouTube Channel, 'X' (formerly Twitter), LinkedIn and Instagram. This is in a bid to ensure that we not only provide information through various channels, but to also enable us to hear from a wide range of voices and perspectives, so that our strategies are aligned to the various persons we serve.



Our stakeholders are able to take advantage of live features on 'X' with "Talk Wid Customs" and our online podcast "Real Talk with Customs", where the Agency addresses new and topical areas of interest to our stakeholders, such as trading under free trade agreements, Contactless Clearance, risk management and border protection.

The Agency has also successfully launched and hosted multiple sessions of our "Click, Connect and Converse with Customs" "Triple C" Online Public Engagement Series, leveraging technology to reach stakeholders wherever they are, allowing them the opportunity to talk with us about their concerns. The most recent forum was held in November 2023, which addressed JCA's Contactless Clearance Process, and the Customs Mobile App, both of which are new initiatives of the Agency.

### ASSESSING IMPACT, ADJUSTING STRATEGIES & COLLABORATING WITH PURPOSE

As a part of our strategy, and as a key proponent of our nation's development and protection, the JCA continuously scans our environment to assess the impact our processes and initiatives are having on our desired outcomes and our stakeholders. It also allows the Agency to adopt a flexible approach and pivot as necessary,



adjusting our strategies to meet our objectives of trade facilitation, protection of our borders and society and collection of revenue due.

In this regard, the Agency has

long-standing initiatives that continue to work effectively and has also adopted new ones to suit the emerging needs of the agency and our stakeholders.

### QUALITY ASSURANCE COMMITTEE

One of the strategies used by the Agency to effectively enhance our relationship with the private sector and other Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) is the hosting of a monthly Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) meeting. The committee is comprised of representatives from the private sector, including customs brokers, warehouse operators, shipping agents and various associations, trade related MDAs and the JCA. It provides an opportunity for open dialogue not only between the committee members and



Customs but also among themselves. It serves to improve transparency and accountability and enhances the quality of service delivered to stakeholders.

### CUSTOMS BUSINESS INTERACTION (CBI)

The CBI is one of the Agency's newest initiatives aimed at strengthening business relations between the JCA and commercial/ industrial stakeholders. The initiative is spearheaded by the office of the Chief Executive Officer and facilitates the interaction of the CEO and her team with executives of the business community through face-to-face meetings and site visits. This allows the Commissioner to see the business' operations firsthand, discuss their operations and to impart relevant information about Customs. This innovative initiative has been warmly received by the business community who have expressed their appreciation and cited huge improvements in their interactions with the Agency. Some of the companies which have benefited from the CBI include: Coldfield Manufacturing Company Limited in Kingston, Walkerswood Jerk Facility in St Ann, and Rainforest Seafood in Montego Bay, who also had high praises for the Agency's Authorised Economic Operator (AEO) Programme.

### JCA STAKEHOLDER AWARDS CEREMONY

The JCA has been the recipient of many awards from their various stakeholders, in acknowledgement of the quality service they have received, however in a reversal of roles in May 2023, the Agency hosted our inaugural Stakeholder Appreciation Awards Ceremony. The ceremony celebrated the relationships between the JCA and our various stakeholders and gave recognition

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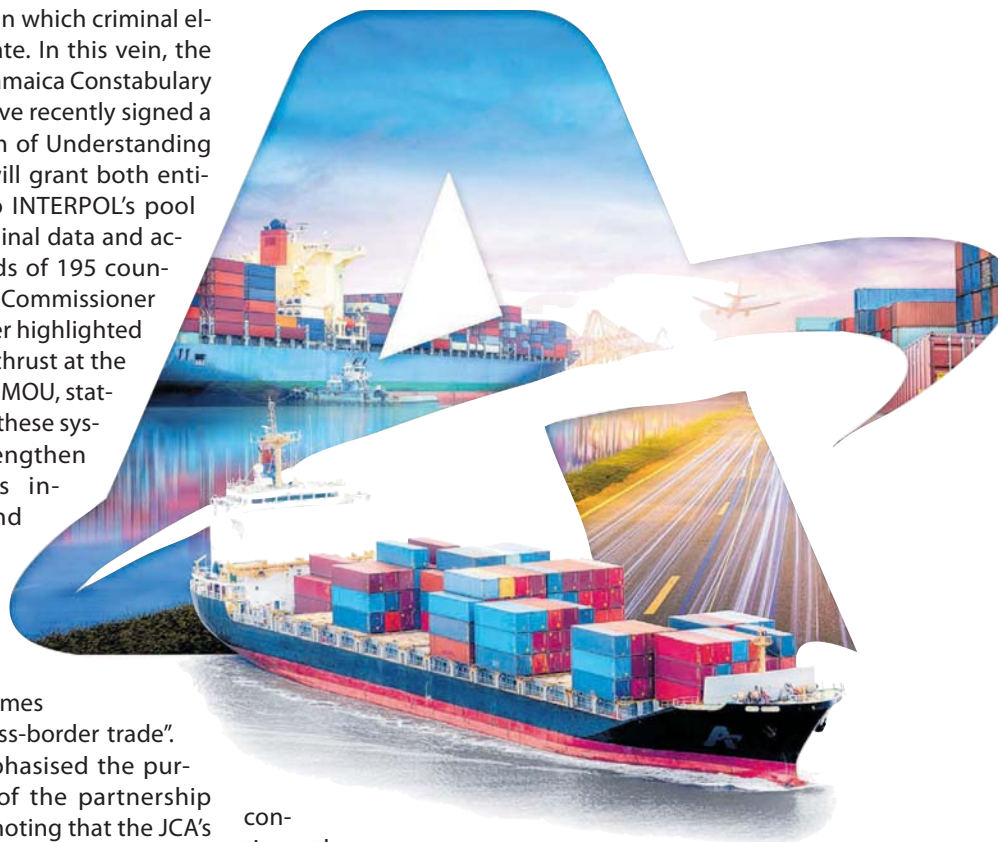
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to the stellar contributions from the awardees. This was another initiative that was well-received and served to enhance the Customs-to-business relations of the JCA, as it fostered an environment of trust and appreciation.

## PURPOSEFUL BORDER PROTECTION COLLABORATIONS

A key mandate of the JCA is that of protecting our nation's borders. To achieve this mandate, the JCA has engaged in numerous operations and initiatives with various arms of law enforcement and other MDAs, adopting a "whole of government" and collaborative approach. This type of engagement has proven to be effective, allowing for sharing of various resources and best practices. The Agency's engagements will continue and will adapt as necessary to suit the fast-changing

environment in which criminal elements operate. In this vein, the JCA and the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF) have recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that will grant both entities access to INTERPOL's pool of global criminal data and access to records of 195 countries globally. Commissioner Ricketts Walker highlighted the Agency's thrust at the signing of the MOU, stating "access to these systems will strengthen the Customs intelligence and risk-based targeting approach, which is crucial to preventing crimes related to cross-border trade". She also emphasised the purposefulness of the partnership with the JCF, noting that the JCA's longstanding partnership with the JCF has proven to be mutually beneficial, and highlighted the need to



continue the collaboration as it will serve to provide far greater results in stemming organised and transnational crimes.

The JCA also continues to collaborate with the WCO and its Members to build capacity and share best practices, through the use and development of targeted Customs tools and instruments, and shared intelligence and data, in a bid to strengthen its response to border threats. One instance of this is the recent workshop that the JCA participated in, which was facilitated by the WCO for the Agency in August 2023 on risk management, one of the driving principles of the Agency.

## MODERNISATION OF CUSTOMS LEGISLATION

As a part of our modernisation efforts, and in response to feedback from the Agency's stakeholders, the JCA is in the process of repealing and replacing the Customs Act, 1941. During this process the Agency has been very purposeful in our engagements with our many stakeholders and has afforded them an opportunity to provide their feedback via robust consultative sessions. The process has been successful thus far, reflecting a Customs Act that represents both Customs and our stakeholders. The Bill is currently before the Houses of Parliament.

## COMMITMENT TO CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

As a signal of the JCA's commitment to quality and continuous improvement, to both our internal and external stakeholders, the Agency embarked on an ambitious bid to attain ISO 9001:2015 Quality Management Systems certification. The journey was a challenging but fruitful one, which saw the JCA engaging with our stakeholders in new and improved ways, demanding improvements in decision making strategies, procedures and processes, including communication protocols and stakeholder management. On April 18, 2023, the JCA became the first English-speaking Customs administration to receive this prestigious international accreditation.

The JCA views engagement with all our stakeholders as being critical to achieving our mandates. The Agency, as demonstrated by our ISO 9001:2015 Quality Management Systems accreditation, along with other numerous initiatives, is dedicated to continuously reassessing our stakeholder engagement strategies and quickly adapting to meet the demands of our ever-evolving landscape, to ensure they remain effective and relevant. We are committed to optimising Custom-to-Business partnerships and actioning relevant feedback.

As a key enabler of national development, and protector of our borders, the Agency is dedicated to playing our role in helping Jamaica become "the place of choice to live, work, raise families and do business."

# Celebrating INTERNATIONAL CUSTOMS WEEK 2024



**"CUSTOMS ENGAGING TRADITIONAL AND NEW PARTNERS WITH PURPOSE"**



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