

## CUSTOMS AND INTERNATIONAL TRADE FORUM

### The Single Trade Window – why we should all get a move on!

**T**hose of you who have been involved in international goods movements for as many years as me will be thinking ‘we’ve heard it all before’ regarding the concept of the ‘Single trade Window’ and indeed we have come across it before. However, back then we didn’t have the technology that today runs throughout our personal and professional lives. Equally the understanding of international goods movements, what was required at the border and who needed information was much more opaque and speed was not such an issue as it is today.

The concept of the ‘Single Trade Window’ is not just a UK idea, many countries have begun to embrace the concept and some actually already have ‘live’ functional Single Trade Windows. Even the European Union (EU) which is usually robustly disparate on matters of customs and tax is working towards it.

So what is the Single Trade Window and why should we all care?

The UK government 2025 Border Strategy sets out the vision for the UK border to be the most effective in the world by 2025. A Single Trade Window is a key commitment within the Strategy for trade with anywhere in the world including the EU. In fact the government has committed £180 million to build it with the intention that it will reduce the cost of trade by streamlining trader interactions with border agencies.

The World Customs Organisation (WCO) defines such Single Windows as ‘a facility that allows parties involved in trade and transport to lodge standardised information and documents with a single entry point to fulfil all import, export, and transit related regulatory requirements’.

To quote the UK government:

‘A Single Trade Window, at its core, ensures a single entry point for border data, which results in reduced duplication for users’. The World Customs Organisation (WCO) sets out a number of key principles and features regarding data:

- The Single Trade Window allows the trader or intermediary to submit all border data needed in a standardised format. This would mean submitting only once to border authorities through a single portal.
- The Single Trade Window puts the onus on government to facilitate data sharing amongst border authorities and agencies to then receive the information they need.

- This therefore eliminates the need for the user to submit the same data to different border authorities or agencies, via multiple different portals.’

As there are usually reckoned to be at least 30 different government departments involved at the UK Border. With different types of consignments, different transport methods and different customs procedures requiring multiple different combinations of these departments. We all know how irritating it is to submit the same information, in different formats over and over again and how easy it is for duplication to mean errors creep in. The offer of a single place to enter the data once has got to be something we can all support.

The UK Government is also concerned to ensure that

- Data protection (GDPR) is robust
- The ability will exist for direct self-declaration of border data by traders and intermediaries
- The ability will exist for interaction with existing port and commercial systems including Community System Providers (CSPs)
- Further data use opportunities for the future will be encompassed including the use of supply chain data and system interoperability

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In April this year the Government announced that the procedure and documentary changes due to start on 1st July 2022 for goods being imported from the EU would not now be implemented and a review would be undertaken into how to implement these remaining controls in an improved way.

A new Target Operating Model would be created (in addition to the Border Operating Model we currently have) based on a better assessment of risk whilst harnessing the power of data and technology. It will be published in the Autumn of 2022 and the new controls regime will come into force at the end of 2023.

The review process will build on existing work already taking place as part of the 2025 Border Strategy, including on the UK Single Trade Window where the goal is to create a seamless new ‘digital’ border, where technologies and real-time data will cut queues and smooth trade.

In other words the intention is for much if not all of the Single Trade Window to come into use by the end of 2023 rather than 2025!

We should all prepare by reviewing:

- Our current use of technology in the supply chain and specifically for border crossing processes
- Where the required data is held
- How the data can be accessed and by whom
- How much of data transfer within our own company, with suppliers, with clients and with intermediaries is manual
- How much we still rely on paper
- How can we improve these processes internally

There is much to be done between now and the end of 2023. It is time for companies of all sizes and types to seize the moment, to let go of ‘the way we have always done it’ and to move forward to using more streamlined digital data taken from the whole supply chain in order to gain greater cost and time benefits.

If you have questions on the Single Trade Window CILT will be happy to help via the Customs and International Trade Forum and the online Community.

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