

### **SARS Preferred Trader/AEO update: 3 March 2020**

The SARS Preferred Trader Programme (PTP) was formalised in May 2017 and has grown substantially to 117 accredited traders as of February 2020. Simultaneously, the Regional Southern African Customs Union (SACU) PTP is making strides as some members of SACU have implemented their National PTP, with only one member state outstanding. Others envisage moving towards a fully-fledged Authorised Economic Operator (AEO) programme in phases.

Under the SARS Strategic Plan (Vision 2024), the priority will be to focus on improving voluntary compliance and supply chain security through implementation of the standardised WCO SAFE Framework of Standards AEO programme.

In order to provide support for the AEO Programme, the SACU Customs Modernisation Programme, funded by the United Kingdom Foreign and Commonwealth Office, hosted an AEO Validation Workshop for SARS from 10 to 14 February 2020 in Pretoria. The SACU Secretariat, Mr. Marcel L. Ratsiu, co-ordinated the workshop which was hosted by SARS.

Attendees included Customs auditors, legal experts, specialists from the SARS Institute of Learning and Customs Relationship Managers.

Rae Vivier, Group Executive responsible for AEO in SARS, opened the workshop and assured the audience that AEO is taken seriously by SARS as it is one of the organisation's key deliverables.

The core values of Customs-to-Business partnerships were highlighted as an important aspect towards achieving AEO programme implementation.

During the five-day workshop, the SARS AEO validation team were familiarised with the WCO SAFE Framework of Standards (FoS), including all its Pillars, core elements, and AEO criteria etc. This was followed by extensive discussions on the essential elements of the AEO Validation Guideline, the sequential steps of the AEO validation procedures and the skills required by AEO validators.

A mock validation process took place at the premises of one of the participants in SARS' AEO Pilot Project. Valuable discussions were held on the responses to the Self-Assessment Questionnaires and the Validation Team conducted a walk-through at the premises. The lessons learnt were shared among the workshop participants and SARS management during the post-validation assessment. During that session, several Mutual Recognition Arrangements/Agreements (MRAs), signed between different Customs administrations, were also discussed in order to enhance learning and information sharing.

The SARS team is progressing well with the Pilot AEO Programme involving the three identified participants. Watch this space for more news ....