

CARIBBEAN

COMMUNITY

SECRETARIAT

**TWENTY-NINTH MEETING OF THE
STANDING COMMITTEE OF
CARIBBEAN STATISTICIANS**

SCCS/2004/29/11

**Hamilton, Bermuda
22-24 November 2004**

15 November 2004

STATUS OF MERCHANDISE TRADE STATISTICS

1. Status of Trade Database

The experience with the submission of Merchandise Trade data to the Secretariat revealed that as at 20 October 2004, ten Member States submitted data for 2003 towards the compilation of the regional trade database. As agreed to at the Twenty-Sixth Meeting of the SCCS, data for a given year should be submitted at the end of the first quarter of the following year, i.e. during the month of April for a specific year data should be received from Member States for the preceding year. Seven Member States submitted data before the end of April 2004 with one submission in March 2004.

Special mention must be made of Barbados for being the Member State to submit their 2003 data in March 2004. This Member State along with St. Kitts and Nevis has over the past years continued to show improvement in terms of submitting data of a high quality and on a timely basis. The Secretariat would like to commend those Member States that submitted data by the end of April. In addition, those Member States that provided provisional data are also commended and are urged to continue their efforts towards finalising the data.

Member States that have been unable to adhere to this timeline should make every effort to comply to enable the timely production of a regional database to inform policy.

The Secretariat is also continuing its focus on the **quality** of the data submitted and would like to report that the trade files for seven Member States were free of queries. Member States also need to now focus on the coverage of trade and problems related to quantities.

Once again, the Secretariat would like to emphasise the importance of trade data and the compilation of a timely and high quality regional database to satisfy the following needs:

- (i) Trade statistics are required to inform policies and negotiations at the international, regional and national levels; and
- (ii) The Secretariat also submits data to the Inter-American Development Bank for inclusion in the Hemispheric Market Access Database.

2. Correction of the Correlation Table based on the Revised Harmonised Commodity Description and Coding System (HS) 2002

The Common External Tariff (CET) that was revised based on the Harmonised Commodity and Description Coding System - HS 2002 was distributed to Member States for implementation at the beginning of 2004. To date, only a few Member States have implemented the updated CET.

Related to the revised CET is the Correlation Table, linking the HS 2002 with the Standard International Trade Classification (SITC Rev 3). This Table was revised and dispatched to Member States to be used in the compilation of Merchandise Trade Statistics. However, only those Member States that have implemented the new CET (i.e. based on HS 2002) can use this correlation table. The Secretariat hopes that all

Member States can implement the Revised HS 2002-based CET, which will realise more harmonised trade data in the Region.

3. Enhancement of Trade Data Dissemination

3.1 The Facilitation of Online Access of Tradsys

The Statistics Sub-Programme of the CARICOM Secretariat has been maintaining a regional trade database since **1980**. The Trade Information System (Tradsys) maintained by the Sub-Programme has detailed data from 1990 for most Member States. Tradsys was recently upgraded from a dBase IV-based version to a Microsoft SQL platform with Microsoft Access as the front-end. At the time of upgrading, it was envisaged that this process would comprise the first phase of a two-phased project, the second phase being the creation of an **online trade dissemination system** that can be queried by privileged users. The aim in this approach was to improve the accessibility of trade data to users such as policy-makers, researchers, members of the private sector, thereby promoting the use of this data in the decision-making process. It is expected that **increased accessibility of trade data will promote its use and will ultimately lead to increased competitiveness in production and greater investment opportunities.**

A proposal for this phase of the project was made to a donor agency and the Secretariat is awaiting feedback from this organisation. This online database would enable privileged users to have access to a series of detailed trade data from 1990 and allow them to query the database at their convenience.

3.2 Project to Bridge the Gaps in the Regional Trade Database

The Secretariat in collaboration with the Statistics Department of Antigua and Barbuda designed a Project aimed at improving the coverage of the national database. This Project was designed to capture the backlog of Antigua and Barbuda's data for the

period 1990-1998. To date, the Secretariat is awaiting feedback from Antigua and Barbuda relative to the purchase of equipment required for the execution of the Project.

4. The New Eurotrace

Participants from CARICOM Member States and The Netherlands Antilles attended a Training Workshop introducing the New Eurotrace software. The Workshop was funded by EUROSTAT and CARTAC and was held in Saint Lucia during the period 20-24 September 2004. Two representatives of the Secretariat were also funded by CARTAC to attend this workshop. The major objective of this Workshop was to train trade statisticians and computer experts from National and Regional Statistical Offices on the use and management of the new EUROTRACE which is a Windows-based software. There was also an extended period of training for trainers.

It was recommended that Member States who currently use Eurotrace should process their trade on both versions until such time that they are confident with the new version and any problems detected have been debugged. A similar approach should be applied to other Member States that currently use customised systems to process their trade. Any problems should be reported to EUROSTAT during the period of testing so that corrections can be made to the software. The final version of this software should be released by the end of this year. This software is provided free to Member States.

The Secretariat is willing to work along with those Member States interested in using the New Eurotrace to process their trade data. The Secretariat would also like to acknowledge the contribution of EUROSTAT for facilitating the Eurotrace workshop and to CARTAC for organising the workshop after consultations with Eurostat and the CARICOM Secretariat and also funding the attendance of the participants. This workshop is of critical importance in enabling the timely processing and dissemination of trade data in the Region.

ACTION REQUIRED

The Meeting is invited to:

- (i) **note** the Progress of Work with respect to the compilation of trade statistics database;
- (ii) **consider** the efforts by Member States to improve on the timeliness and on the quality of the data submitted to the Secretariat;
- (iii) **also note** the developmental work on the updating of the Correlation Table linking the HS-SITC;
- (iv) **further note** the potential of the New Eurotrace software and acquisition of this software by interested Member States;
- (v) **commend** EUROSTAT and CARTAC for enabling the conduct of the training workshop on the New Eurotrace.
