



Council for Trade in Goods

WTO RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC

**REPORT BY THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE
COUNCIL FOR TRADE IN GOODS**

The following report is being submitted by the Chairperson of the Council for Trade in Goods (CTG, or the Council), Mr Etienne OUDOT DE DAINVILLE, under his own responsibility. The report was prepared with the assistance of the Secretariat and follows the same approach as the reports that were requested from the Chairpersons of the CTG's 14 subsidiary bodies.¹

1 REGULAR COUNCIL WORK

1.1. At its meeting of 10 June 2020, the CTG considered an agenda item that had been requested by Canada; Colombia; Costa Rica; Hong Kong, China; New Zealand; Norway; Singapore; Switzerland; and Uruguay entitled "COVID-19: Measures Related to Trade in Goods".² In light of the high number of emergency trade-related measures that were being introduced in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, these delegations were of the view that, since the CTG was the body responsible for overseeing these issues, it should have increased monitoring and transparency of such measures. They also referred to document [G/C/W/780](#), where they had proposed to request the Secretariat to prepare a factual report that would facilitate Members' understanding of the measures in place, including their impact, based on the information available and without duplication of other work at the WTO. The co-sponsors also expected the CTG's subsidiary bodies to work in a coherent manner, including by reporting on their actions on this topic in their respective reports, so that the CTG could then hold its own dedicated discussions. Finally, they proposed to include a dedicated item on the CTG's agenda, affording Members a horizontal view of the discussions taking place, including all of the measures that Members had taken in response to the pandemic.

1.2. In response, some Members considered that it was necessary to clarify the scope and impact of the different aspects of the proposal, and recalled the acute problems being faced by a number of Members as a result of the pandemic, as well as their resource and capacity constraints. Other Members observed that the WTO Trade Monitoring Report and the CTG's subsidiary bodies were already compiling this type of information, risking duplication and the creation of an additional burden for Members. Finally, some Members cautioned against the introduction of standing agenda items, considering that such items should be added using the normal procedures, as needed.

1.3. At its meeting of 25 November 2020³, the Council continued to discuss this proposal and, upon the request of the item's co-sponsors, the Secretariat made a short presentation on the measures implemented by Members in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The item's co-sponsors submitted a revised proposal, in document [G/C/W/788](#), which included a list of questions intended to focus on the overall picture of implementation of COVID-19-related measures and initiatives, as well as room document [RD/CTG/11](#), which compiled the discussions that had taken place in the CTG's subsidiary bodies. These delegations were of the view that it was time for the CTG to have a discussion on monitoring the functioning of the rules-based multilateral trading system in the context of the pandemic, and to encourage good practices in the CTG's subsidiary bodies. On the form of the proposal, other delegations expressed concern over the fact that the documents had been submitted immediately prior to the meeting, which had not allowed sufficient time for their review; on the substance, they considered that the proposal would lead to duplication, or even an undermining of

¹ See document [JOB/CTG/18](#).

² See document [G/C/M/137](#), Agenda Item 5.

³ See document [G/C/M/138](#), Agenda Item 5.

the work that was being undertaken by the CTG's subsidiary bodies. Other Members reiterated the concerns over the proposal that had already been expressed on previous occasions. No consensus was reached, and this was the last time that the issue was discussed by the Council. No action was subsequently taken.

1.1 Transparency

1.4. Three communications were submitted to the Council by two Members at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. The first communication was a joint Declaration by New Zealand and Singapore, entitled "Declaration on Trade in Essential Goods for Combating the COVID-19 Pandemic" ([G/C/W/777](#)), which provided for a series of actions with respect to tariffs, export restrictions, non-tariff barriers, and trade facilitation, and which indicated a list of products considered to be essential. In addition, both New Zealand ([G/C/W/778](#)) and Singapore ([G/C/W/779](#)) submitted individual communications describing their actions and identifying the specific products that had been subject to facilitated import procedures. Although these documents were referred to at the Council's meeting of 10 June 2020 in the context of the proposal mentioned in Section 1, they were not included as separate agenda items. In addition, the CTG did not oversee notifications in relation to the pandemic.

1.2 Trade concerns

1.5. At its meeting of 31 March 2021⁴, the Council considered a trade concern raised by Australia in relation to the European Union's decision to extend the scope and duration of its transparency and authorization mechanism for exports of COVID-19 vaccines. At this meeting, 18 other delegations took the floor on this issue. However, this concern has not been raised again since then, and no other trade concern relating to COVID-19 measures was subsequently raised at the CTG.

1.3 Information notes

1.6. The Secretariat did not produce any information notes for the CTG's consideration, but upon the request of the co-sponsors to the agenda item on COVID-19 measures relating to trade in goods, it did make a short presentation at the Council's meeting of 25 November 2020.⁵

⁴ See document [G/C/M/139](#), Agenda Item 9.

⁵ See document [G/C/M/138](#), Agenda Item 5.