

Committee on Trade and Environment

ITEM 4: THE PROVISIONS OF THE MULTILATERAL TRADING SYSTEM
WITH RESPECT TO THE TRANSPARENCY OF TRADE MEASURES USED
FOR ENVIRONMENTAL PURPOSES AND ENVIRONMENTAL MEASURES
AND REQUIREMENTS WHICH HAVE SIGNIFICANT TRADE EFFECTS

The Central Registry of Notifications (CRN)

Note by the Secretariat

1. At the meeting of the Committee on 20-21 July 1996, a request was made to the Secretariat to prepare an information note on the coverage and operation of the WTO Central Registry of Notifications (CRN). This note responds to that request.
2. The Marrakesh Ministerial Decision on Notification Procedures states that "[a] central registry of notifications shall be established under the responsibility of the Secretariat. While Members will continue to follow existing notification procedures, the Secretariat shall ensure that the central registry records such elements of the information provided on the measures by the Member concerned as its purpose, its trade coverage, and the requirement under which it has been notified. The central registry shall cross-reference its records of notifications by Member and obligation."
3. The CRN is an electronic database to keep track of notifications by providing:
 - an inventory of all notification requirements under the WTO;
 - an index of all notifications received by the Secretariat from Members; and
 - upon request, information on compliance by Members with notification requirements.
4. A Task Force was set up in the Secretariat in 1995 to oversee the creation of the CRN. The Registry operates in the same way as the traditional library catalogue which stores on index cards essential information about each item in its collection. The CRN is a collection of records, which store essential information on notifications. A record is created in the CRN at the same time the notification received from a Member is circulated. Each record contains information on:
 - notifying Member(s);
 - Members to whom the notification applies;
 - the date of the notification;
 - the subject of the notification;
 - the requirement under which the notification is made;
 - periodicity;
 - trade coverage (sectors, products, etc. to which the notification refers);
 - the existence of a counternotification;
 - the symbol of the corresponding full-text notification document;
 - other miscellaneous information.

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5. Notification requirements under the WTO are numerous and, given the potential membership of the Organisation, several thousand separate notifications will be made each year to the Secretariat. The CRN permits data searches to be made both at the Divisional level of the Secretariat and from a central point. It is possible to find out which Members have notified under a particular requirement, and whether a particular Member has fulfilled its obligations. The results of searches may be printed and this information can be used in different ways: by the Secretariat for missions, as input in the compilation of TPR reports or to provide more general information on the trading system. As required by the Ministerial Decision, the CRN will be used to inform each Member annually of the regular notification obligations to which that Member will be expected to respond in the course of the following year, and to draw the attention of individual Members to their regular notification requirements which remain unfulfilled.

6. The CRN can be used by the Secretariat to periodically compile notifications of trade-related environmental measures by searching for (i) notifications made under specific WTO provisions which relate expressly to the environment (e.g. notifications under Annex 2, paragraph 12 of the Agreement on Agriculture, and under Article 8.2 (c) of the Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures) as well as (ii) notifications in which the policy objective of the measures is stated to be the protection of the environment (e.g. notifications under the Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade). In some cases, the Secretariat may need to exercise its judgement on whether or not to include a measure where the stated policy objectives are several or are unclear.