



Committee on Market Access

**FEEDBACK SESSION ON THE WTO'S PUBLICATIONS AND ONLINE TOOLS
TO DISSEMINATE TARIFF AND IMPORT DATA**

SUMMARY BY THE SECRETARIAT¹

1 BACKGROUND

1.1. On 28 May 2019, the Committee on Market Access (the Committee) adopted a new Decision for the notification of import and tariff data as part of the Modalities and Operation of the Integrated Database (the IDB Decision)², which replaced a similar Decision from 1997.³

1.2. Pursuant to paragraph 15 of the newly adopted IDB Decision, the Committee held an informal dedicated session on 17 July 2019 to discuss Members' feedback on, and experience of, the publications and online tools developed over the years by the Secretariat to disseminate tariff and import data that was collected through the IDB and Consolidated Tariff Schedules (CTS) databases.

1.3. The meeting began with presentations by the Secretariat on six different dissemination tools (see Annex) and then turned to a discussion with Members of the four questions that had been raised in the convening e-mail. Twelve delegations⁴ took the floor and provided feedback on one or more of the questions that the Chairperson had addressed to them.

2 SUMMARY OF MEMBERS' FEEDBACK

2.1. Members' feedback ranged from comments of a general nature to very specific suggestions for improving specific tools. The main points raised under each question may be summarized as follows.

a) Which are the WTO publications and online tools that you use to access tariff and import data? Which are their most useful features?

2.2. Members commented that they frequently used and highly valued the tariff and import data that was processed and compiled by the WTO Secretariat. Appropriate access to reliable tariff and import data was considered to be a key component of the transparency function of the WTO. However, Members appeared to underutilize these tools as it appeared that some of them were unknown.

2.3. While some Members preferred to use the WTO's tools to access tariff data, others relied instead on other sources and databases to retrieve import data. More specifically, some Members reported that they used WTO tools primarily to download raw data in bulk, mainly through the Tariff Analysis Online (TAO), so that it could subsequently be processed by their own systems. Other Members stated that they did rely on the WTO online tools to query and analyse trade data.

2.4. Members expressed their appreciation for the summary information contained in the World Tariff Profiles publication, which they considered to be a quick and reliable source of information, in particular for briefing senior officials.

¹ This document is without prejudice to Members' rights and obligations under the WTO Agreement.

² G/MA/367.

³ The Decision of the General Council of 18 July 1997 (WT/L/225).

⁴ Australia; Brazil; Canada; China; Costa Rica; European Union; Hong Kong, China; Republic of Korea; Russian Federation; Sri Lanka; Turkey and the United States.

2.5. Members recognized that TAO was the most powerful and comprehensive WTO tool for tariff and import data and was frequently used by several agencies. In the opinion of these Members, the presentation of different data elements (e.g. bound tariffs, applied tariffs, and import data) at the 8-digit level, under the same umbrella, was one of the principal strengths of this tool.

2.6. Similarly, Members believed that the Regional Trade Agreements and Preferential Trade Agreements databases were useful tools, in particular for extracting information used for briefing senior officials. Members found it especially useful to have direct access to other information through the same platform (for example, the text of the free trade agreements).

2.7. Regarding the WTO DATA Portal, several Members noted that, since this tool was relatively new, they were still exploring its functionalities and learning how to use it. They believed that this could be a very useful tool in terms of cross-cutting information on time series.

b) Are the publications and online tools used by the WTO Secretariat to disseminate IDB and CTS data adequate to meet your needs? If not, which needs are not being met?

2.8. Some Members noted that they were not aware of many of the tools that were discussed at the meeting. Geneva-based delegates had found out about them only through the Committee's recent discussions.

c) What are, in your opinion, the main areas that need to be improved? Should the Secretariat develop new functionalities? If so, which ones?

2.9. The main difficulties reported by Members included that the WTO tools on tariff and import data were difficult to operate, were not user-friendly, and often lacked functionalities that were included in other WTO tools. TAO was referred to by a number of Members as an example of an outdated interface that could frustrate its users. Members suggested that the interface be improved to make it clearer and easier to use. Some Members pointed to ITC's MacMap and to the UN COMTRADE as examples of tools that were easier to use than TAO.

2.10. Some Members noted that, since the information was scattered across several different online tools, the user was often obliged to switch from one tool to another in order to access a slightly different part of the same type of information (for example, to compare bound tariff, applied tariff, and preferential tariff data).

2.11. Members found it difficult to extract data from some of the applications and in particular from TAO, which, in their view, required too many clicks when navigating its content. ITC's MacMap and UN COMTRADE were again mentioned as tools that allowed for an easier downloading of data.

2.12. Members complained that the format used for exporting data from WTO tools was limited to Microsoft applications, some of which were difficult to operate (for example, MS Access). They also considered that the coding used in the files should be reviewed. For example, some Members might prefer to use the full names of Members instead of using only their numerical code. Some Members also suggested that, when the user downloaded a file, they should have the option of seeing the relevant information presented together in the same sheet, as opposed to receiving it as separate sheets in one Excel file. In their view, the user should not be expected to compile the different types of information by themselves.

2.13. Some Members suggested that it would be helpful to improve the current manuals and to provide training on how to use the existing WTO tools.

2.14. In terms of new functionalities, Members recommended the following actions:

- To develop new smartphone applications, or the possibility to open and use current applications on mobile devices;
- To simplify the comparison between applied and bound tariffs by taking into account HS transposition changes;

- To develop new tools to assist Members in verifying the HS transpositions and/or to appreciate the impact of specific HS changes;
 - To add access to value added statistics and information on preferential rules of origin;
 - To improve the way in which the information concerning bound TRQs was presented in the tools;
 - To ensure that the tools could be accessed without requiring a username and password, unless there was a very good reason for requiring them (for example, access to restricted data).
- d) *Are the WTO publications and online tools properly organized and easily accessible? If not, what could be done by the Secretariat to improve the situation?*

2.15. Some Members expressed their frustration over the fragmentation of different tools over different websites. They suggested that the different functionalities should be merged into a single tool or, at the very least, that a portal should be developed exhaustively to list and direct Members to all the relevant WTO websites incorporating online tools.

ANNEX

WTO DISSEMINATION TOOLS

1. **World Tariff Profiles:** A publication jointly developed by the WTO Secretariat, the International Trade Centre (ITC), and UNCTAD, which provides comprehensive summary information on the tariffs and non-tariff measures imposed by over 170 countries and customs territories. Tariff data is presented in comparative tables and in one-page profiles for each economy. The 2019 edition also includes a summary table containing import and export profiles for the countries included in the report.

https://www.wto.org/english/res_e/reser_e/tariff_profiles_e.htm

2. **The Tariff Analysis Online (TAO):** An advanced online system that allows users to extract detailed information for specific products, including bound and applied tariffs at the national tariff line level (HS-8 digit, or more), as well as import data. The TAO has analytical reports and allows filtering criteria for the purposes of analysis. Authorized users can access all of the approved data, but only Members and the Secretariat can access provisional data. Public access is limited to unrestricted data.

<https://tao.wto.org/>

3. **Preferential Trade Arrangements (PTA) Database:** An online system based on notifications relating to the PTA-Transparency Mechanism. The database contains reference information on notified PTAs; it serves as document repository; it includes summary statistics of preferential tariffs and imports, including preference utilization.

<http://ptadb.wto.org/>

4. **WTO DATA Portal (WTODATA):** An online system with general statistical indicators relating to WTO issues, including bound and MFN applied tariffs. The tariff data in this portal reproduces the content of the Tariff Download Facility (<http://tdf.wto.org>).

<http://data.wto.org/>

5. **Data Maps:** A section of the WTO webpage that allows users to visualize different data elements, including trade and tariff data.

[International Trade and Market Access Data](#)

6. **Regional Trade Agreements (RTA) Database:** An online system with information on notified RTAs, as well as all other documents on RTAs, including tariff liberalization commitments and intra-RTA import data. It also permits users to search and compare applied MFN and preferential tariff commitments by product, as well as by topic.

<http://rtais.wto.org>
