

# Easier for companies to apply for Customs schemes

## Account managers will advise traders on various schemes

By **TEH SHI NING**

SINGAPORE Customs has simplified and streamlined the way companies apply and are assessed for Customs schemes.

Launched yesterday, the new TradeFirst (trade facilitation and integrated risk-based system) integrates all Customs schemes' different requirements into a single set of criteria used to assess a company's eligibility.

This is expected to benefit companies requiring multiple schemes such as the secure trade partnership, zero-GST warehouse scheme, strategic trade scheme or temporary import scheme. They will no longer need to submit multiple applications and be subjected to multiple assessments.

Each company Singapore Customs deals with will also be assigned an account manager – not unlike a bank's relationship manager. And this will soon be backed by a customer relationship management system too, Singapore Customs director-general Fong Yong Kian said yesterday.

Previously, traders were not aware of the suite of Customs schemes available while Customs at times did not know companies well, Mr Fong said.

Now, account managers can proactively suggest schemes to suit traders' business needs, while companies get a clearer picture of what they stand to gain from tightening internal processes.



**Mr Ong:** Non-tariff barriers such as customs controls and regulations need to be minimised

Of the 156 companies that went through a pilot assessment, 29 were certified under the "premium" band – the highest of five bands indicating how robust a company's systems, internal practices and security measures are.

Ministry of Finance's permanent secretary Peter Ong said at the launch that while Singapore's status as a trading hub has been bolstered by tariff reductions through a growing network of free trade agreements, non-tariff barriers such as customs controls and regulations need to be minimised too.

He also stressed the importance of ensuring global supply chain security.

The new TradeFirst framework should help Customs "foster even closer relationships with business-

es", he said. And the banding system will help it facilitate cargo consignments from lower risk companies, and set in place a virtuous cycle where companies are incentivised to adopt good supply chain security practices.

Singapore Business Federation chief executive Teng Theng Dar said the single-window approach saves time and cost, as well as removes uncertainty and ambiguity.

"I would say Singapore Customs has taken the lead in the region to respond to the business community's requirements in terms of supply chain connectivity. It is not just about enforcing rules, but facilitating trade while making companies aware of what is required on the security side of things," he said.