



## **SACU COMMENCES WITH THE SECOND PHASE OF THE REGIONAL AUTHORISED ECONOMIC OPERATOR (AEO) MUTUAL RECOGNITION ARRANGEMENT (MRA) PILOT BETWEEN BOTSWANA, NAMIBIA AND SOUTH AFRICA**

### **PRESS STATEMENT**

**10 AUGUST 2026, WINDHOEK, NAMIBIA**

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1. The Botswana Unified Revenue Service (BURS), the Namibia Revenue Agency (NamRA) and the South African Revenue Service (SARS) will officially commence the SACU Regional Authorised Economic Operator (AEO) Mutual Recognition Arrangement (MRA) Pilot on the 18<sup>th</sup> August 2026. Building on the success of the first pilot phase that was conducted between Eswatini, Lesotho and South Africa from January to March 2026, the second phase involves Botswana, Namibia and South Africa and will run from 18 August 2026 to March 2027.
2. The pilot will test the practical implementation of the SACU Regional AEO Mutual Recognition Arrangement (MRA) in live operational environments at selected border posts. It will assess the operational impact of extending AEO-accredited trader benefits across the SACU Common Customs Area, evaluate the effectiveness of cross-border recognition processes, procedures and supporting systems and identify implementation challenges and appropriate mitigation measures. Furthermore, the pilot will assess operational readiness of Member States, determine measures required to strengthen cooperation between Revenue Administrations and Other Government Agencies and generate evidence-based recommendations to support informed decision-making as well as the successful regional rollout of the MRA. Full implementation of the SACU Regional AEO MRA across all SACU Member States is expected to commence in April 2027.
3. The pilot represents a significant milestone in the implementation of SACU's Customs Modernisation Programme and demonstrates SACU's commitment to facilitating secure, efficient and predictable cross-border trade across the region.
4. The commencement of the 2<sup>nd</sup> pilot phase follows a series of successful operational dry-runs conducted to validate systems, procedures and readiness. The first dry-run was undertaken at the Port of Walvis Bay, Namibia, on the 29<sup>th</sup> July 2026, followed by the Mamuno and Buitepos Border Posts along the Trans-Kalahari Corridor on the 31<sup>st</sup> July 2026. Further dry-runs were conducted between Botswana and South Africa at the Tlokweng and Kopfontein Border Posts on 3 - 4 August 2026 and between Namibia and South Africa on 6 - 7 August 2026. These exercises enabled Revenue Administrations, AEO Experts, Other Government Agencies and the SACU Secretariat to assess operational processes, validate standard operating procedures, observe the processing of AEO-accredited traders and identify practical improvements ahead of the launching of the pilot.
5. The pilot seeks to move the Signed SACU Mutual Recognition Arrangement from policy into practical implementation by testing the delivery of regional AEO benefits to accredited traders under live operating conditions within the Common Customs Area.

6. The AEO Programme is a cornerstone of the World Customs Organization (WCO) SAFE Framework of Standards and is designed to strengthen both trade facilitation and supply chain security. Under the SACU Regional Mutual Recognition Arrangement, accredited traders will progressively benefit from:
- (a) expedited clearance and release of goods through risk-based processing;
  - (b) reduced routine inspections for accredited AEO traders;
  - (c) priority physical inspections, where required;
  - (d) flexible inspection arrangements, which allows inspections at an alternative approved location; and
  - (e) mutual recognition of AEO status across SACU Member States.
7. The Programme is expected to reduce border delays, improve supply chain safety and security as well as to improve cross-border efficiency. These interventions are contributing towards strengthening the competitiveness of businesses trading within the SACU region. It also promotes enhanced cooperation between Revenue Administrations and Other Government Agencies through improved information sharing, coordinated risk management and more streamlined border processes.
8. SACU encourages eligible traders throughout the region to participate in the AEO Programme and benefit from its trusted trader framework. As at the end of the first quarter of the 2026/27 financial year, the SACU region had 1,070 accredited Authorised Economic Operators, distributed as follows Botswana: 9, Eswatini: 33, Lesotho: 14, Namibia: 10 and South Africa 1,006.
9. The SACU Secretariat welcomes the continued commitment of Member States, Revenue Administrations, Other Government Agencies and other stakeholders in the Private Sector who are involved in advancing customs modernisation, trade facilitation and regional integration.

Issued by;



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