

# Challenges in identifying existing trade flows of substitutes and alternatives to plastics

"Workshop on sustainable and effective substitutes and alternatives for plastics"

Geneva, 6 December 2022, WTO / UNCTAD

## What is the Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System (HS)?



A goods Nomenclature, a **Universal Customs Language** currently supporting more than 98% of global trade!



It enables goods moving across borders to be uniformly described all over the world.

### **HS** – current status and potential



Can the HS facilitate the trade of sustainable and effective substitutes and alternatives to plastics?

Are these substitutes and alternatives visible in the current HS?

Are they classified in the same HS codes as the "traditionally" traded goods?

To what extent does the HS have the potential to facilitate the trade of these alternative products?

### **Example 1 - Shopping bags**



"Traditionally" traded

Polyethylene (PE) single-use bag

HS code: 3923.21



Polypropylene (PP) single-use bag

HS code: 3923.29

### **Example 1 - Shopping bags**



"Newly" traded alternative

Biodegradable bag made of vegetable starch, glycerin and poly(vinyl alcohol)

HS code: 3923.29

Exactly the same subheading as that of polypropylene single-use bags

### **Example 2 – Disposable dinner plates**



"Traditionally" traded

Disposable dinner plates made of polypropylene

HS code: 3924.10



"Newly" traded alternatives

Moulded dinner plates made of sugar cane

HS code: 4823.70



## **Example 2 – Disposable dinner plates**



	3.20 cop p	Other paper, paperboard, cellulose wadding cellulose fibres, cut to size or shape; other articles of paperboard, cellulose wadding or webs constituted for self-recording specific sheets and dials, printed for self-recording	cles of paper pulp, of cellulose fibres.	
4823	3.61 3.69 3.70	Trays, dishes, plates, cups and the like, of paper Of bamboo Other Moulded or pressed articles of paper pulp Other	Sugar cane plates and traditional disposable plastic plates are in a different HS code (4823.70 vs 3924.10).	Subheading 4823.70 does not specifically cover moulded or pressed tableware and kitchenware of paper pulp.

### **Example 3 – Drinking straws**



"Traditionally" traded

Disposable plastic drinking straws



HS code: 3917.32

"Newly" traded alternatives

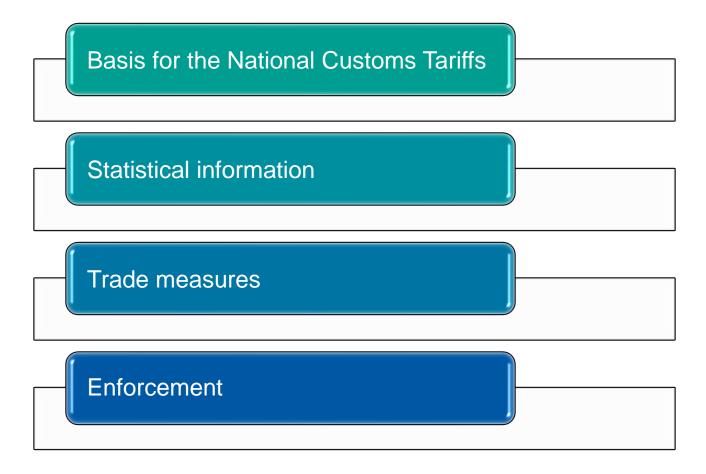
Bamboo drinking straws

HS code: 4419.19



### For what purposes is the HS used?





# Challenges in identifying the existing trade flows of substitutes and alternatives to plastics



The Classification is done at the border!

Clear and objective criteria for the definition of the goods covered by a code

This criteria must be observable or testable at the border

Acceptable globally and not be changed over the life cycle of the HS version

### Identification of alternatives for plastics



## Moulded dinner plates made of sugar cane

#### **HS 2022**

4823.70 - Moulded or pressed articles of paper pulp



### Maybe for HS 2027?

4823.7 - Moulded or pressed articles of paper pulp

4823.71 -- Plates

4823.79 -- Other

# Challenges in identifying the existing trade flows of substitutes and alternatives to plastics



Subdivision by feedstock for plastics in primary form, dividing fossil fuel, biobased or recycled feedstocks.

The defining criteria must be observable or testable at the border.

### Identification of alternatives for plastics



Biodegradable bag made of vegetable starch, glycerin and poly(vinyl alcohol)

```
3923.2 - Sacks and bags (including cones)
3923.21 -- of polymers of ethylene
3923.29 -- of other plastics
```

```
3923.2 - Sacks and bags (including cones)
3923.21 -- of polymers of ethylene
3923.xx -- ?????
3923.29 -- of other plastics
```



#### Ms. Ulla LARSSON and Ms. Alexandra KELAIDOPOULOU

**Tariff and Trade Affairs Directorate, WCO** 







