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From:	Secretary-General of the European Commission, signed by Mr Jordi AYET PUIGARNAU, Director
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To:	Mr Jeppe TRANHOLM-MIKKELSEN, Secretary-General of the Council of the European Union

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Delegations will find attached document SWD(2018) 447 final.

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**COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT**  
**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE EVALUATION**  
**of the European Customs Inventory of Chemical Substances (ECICS)**

{SWD(2018) 446 final}

This report presents the results of the evaluation of the European Customs Inventory for Chemical Substances (ECICS). The evaluation exercise was conducted between 2016 and 2017 and was supported by an external study which has been carried out by an independent external evaluator. The present Staff Working Document is largely based on the results and conclusions of the external evaluation study.

ECICS is a free to access database which enables users, particularly economic operators, to correctly identify the customs tariff applicable to chemical substances. A secure version of the inventory is used by DG TAXUD, customs authorities and laboratories and includes more identification data.

The purpose of this evaluation was to assess the effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, EU added value and sustainability of the ECICS database, and its coherence vis-à-vis other existing databases. The ultimate aim of this evaluation exercise is to contribute to evidence-based policy-making, to demonstrate the economic and societal value of ECICS and to identify possible improvements. The scope of the evaluation covered both the publicly available and secure versions of ECICS.

In terms of temporal scope, the period from ECICS' inception in 1974 to spring 2017 was considered.

The evaluation approach consisted of a combination of analysis of data from existing sources, and direct engagement of database users and other stakeholders to generate new primary data. This resulted in a combination of quantitative and qualitative data that was mapped to the different evaluation questions and triangulated to arrive at robust and well-founded conclusions and recommendations.

Based on the evidences collected and analysed with this evaluation, it was concluded that ECICS is definitely an added value for the EU users because it meets the specific needs of stakeholders.

At a high level it is worth pointing out that the **Customs Union is an exclusive competence of the EU**. This means that customs rules, including those related to the import and export of chemicals, are set at EU level. Since national authorities are then responsible for implementing these rules consistently, it is vital to base their decisions and behaviour on identical information. Thus, the European nature of customs implies that if any public actor should take responsibility for a database such as ECICS, that actor should be at European level. This shows that the database brings **added value for the EU** and its stakeholders.

Considering the **relevance** of ECICS related to the extent to which different user groups need the information contained in the database, it can be concluded that **ECICS meets the specific needs of stakeholders**. For the vast majority of economic operators and customs authorities, these needs were encapsulated in the core function of the public version of ECICS, namely the identification of Combined Nomenclature (CN) and Harmonized System (HS) codes for customs classification purposes.

As regards the **effectiveness** of ECICS and its capability to ease the life of its users, it is worth to say that **ECICS contributes substantially to the work of its core users**. Most importantly for economic operators and customs authorities, ECICS saves time in terms of chemical and tariff classification tasks.

Concerning the **coherence** of ECICS, the evaluation **confirmed that the database is unique**. For Combined Nomenclature (CN) / Harmonized System (HS) classification (on the public version) and

detailed identification data on chemicals (on the secure version), there are no readily available alternatives to ECICS.

Evaluating the **efficiency** of ECICS by conducting a cost-effectiveness assessment to compare the benefit achieved for the database's main user groups with the costs incurred, it can be concluded that ECICS **provides demonstrable value for money**. As an EU initiative, ECICS also **generates economies of scale** by allowing all Member States to benefit from the same database.

However, the evaluation pointed out that ECICS is far to be perfect. Most important were criticisms from users about the **insufficient coverage of chemicals and timeliness of updates**. Linked to this there were **concerns about classifications in ECICS not being legally binding**, meaning that users applied them at their own risk. Due to the **lack of resources to promote the database**, many potentially relevant stakeholders do not even know about it. At the same time, it was found that **considerable time and effort were devoted to providing information that few users expressed a need for**.

Considering all the findings mentioned above, in order to help improve ECICS over time, the Commission could increase the database's added value by placing greater focus on its core functions, carrying out updates more frequently and increasing its coverage of substances. The Commission could consider integrating ECICS into a broader customs platform and increasing communications efforts to reach new user groups for whom ECICS could potentially provide useful support.

As a follow-up of this evaluation, the Commission considers the increase of the coverage of substances in ECICS as a priority. Member States and Economic Operators should be involved in this enrichment. In addition, the synchronisation of the public website will be carried out more often as suggested. ECICS will be integrated in other systems which could be mutually beneficiary such as CLASS. An integration of ECICS in platforms dealing specifically with chemicals or trade could also be envisaged. In addition, the Commission considers retaining the database in its current form in the short-term, while making incremental improvements that would address some of the shortcomings identified during the evaluation such as

- Adding links to other databases;
- Reducing errors, particularly with regard to translation;
- Make the translation module public;
- Decreasing the time delay between updates;
- Make the interface more user-friendly;
- Enhance monitoring.

Finally, the Commission intends to promote ECICS in any potential user groups and will try to develop cooperation, with Commission services, national authorities and economic operators.

The Commission will undertake a dedicated exercise to address the lessons learnt and draw up an action plan for their implementation and follow-up.