Container dispute comes to a head

Unless sense prevails over High Cube ISO containers the South African fruit export industry faces an uphill road battle

The economic impact of the enforcement of South African transport law on the transportation of High Cube ISO containers on South African roads is under investigation, as the country's Transport Authority considers enforcing the law from the end of this year.

If enforced, only about 20 per cent of the trucks used to transport these containers across the country will meet legal requirements, which have a huge impact on the South African fruit export sector.

Fruit South Africa (FSA), the umbrella body of the South African fruit industries normally used for lobbying the government, is busy with an economic impact study which will have to be submitted by Monday.

This follows a request from the Department of Trade and Industry to the South African Association of Freight Forwarders (SAAFF) to submit such an impact study in order for the matter to be discussed further before the deadline for the enforcement of the law expires in December 2018.

The matter has been dragging on since late 2009, when road traffic Inspectors in Kwa-Zulu Natal started targeting the 'High Cube' ISO containers when transported on the majority of standard South African road trailers, as these containers were some 200mm to 300mm above the legal height limit of 4,300mm. Inspectors started detaining and fining carriers in transgression of the regulation.

The total height of an ISO High Cube container from base to roof is 2,900mm. In order to comply with regulation 224b, High Cube containers would be required to be transported on road trailers with a maximum load deck height of 1,400mm.

A reprieve was granted, but in December 2017 the minister of transport announced in parliament that his department was going to ensure that the legislation is complied with once the December 2018 deadline expires. He stated that the industry was given time to ensure that they complied with the requirements.

Fruit South Africa’s position on the matter is that the present moratorium be extended for a further three years to allow a number of things to be considered.

FSA states that High Cube ISO containers have been transported on South African roads for many years both under load and empty without known incidents and if the law is to be enforced, sufficient time should be allowed for the amendment of the offending regulation in the law.

Where it deemed that compliance to regulation 224b is enforceable subject to evidence, FSA says sufficient time must be granted for trailer manufacturers and transporters to roll out compliant trailer fleets.

“Due to the foreseeable economic impact on import/export reliant industries, Transnet, the maritime sector and the South African economy at large, it is critical that a cordial solution is sought to rectify the present circumstance,” FSA stated.