

South Africa's citrus industry body is hopeful for an end to the issues that have plagued the country's ports over recent years now that the port operator has appointed a new chief.

Transnet Port Terminals (TPT) brought on Velile Dube as its new chief executive effective on July 1, following years of delays at key ports for agricultural exports.

The last few months have also seen widespread disruption amid the Covid-19 pandemic, with significantly reduced capacity at some ports - especially the Cape Town Container Terminal - following positive detections of the virus among workers.

Dube, who previously served in various positions across the port terminals, described his first few weeks in the role as a "[baptism of fire](#)", amid severe challenges stemming from the pandemic.

Representatives of the Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa (CGA) held a teleconference call last week with Dube, board member Louis von Zeuner, and all the container terminal managers across all the ports, to discuss how to minimize disruption in the future.

"Velile outlined his plan for TPT going forward and he has already made sweeping changes," said CGA CEO Justin Chadwick in a [newsletter](#). "Something which we believe to be positive is the fact that each terminal manager will be at the centre of that terminal's functioning and performance."

"All activities will be directly accountable to the terminal manager where previously many core functions were centralized; such as maintenance of machinery and equipment."

In addition to this positive change regarding port terminal management in South Africa, Chadwick said that the TPT is on the warpath to solve the issue of widespread ailing equipment in its ports.

He said the company will have a massive procurement and maintenance drive, adding that having the terminal managers at the core of this will see things change "drastically".

Human resources will also be decentralized and taken back to terminal level, which Chadwick described as "another very positive move".

The CGA is also pushing to improve port infrastructure, and for an integrated systems approach to connect all stakeholders through a central online platform.

"Outlined in the meeting with TPT is the fact that over the past three citrus seasons, exports have been heavily impacted by operational problems at the container terminals - Durban in 2018, Ngqura and PE in 2019 and now Cape Town in 2020 (to acknowledge, the latter very much associated with the impact from COVID-19)," Chadwick said.

"Let this be the last year and that from 2021 we see successes across all the terminals as the success of the container terminals will have a direct impact on the success of the citrus export industry."