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‘TPT ready and prepared for record citrus volumes’

08 May 2020 - by Liesl Venter

Transnet Port Terminals (TPT) has allayed fears that it will not have capacity to move record volumes of citrus through its terminals during the current peak season.

This comes after industry expressed its concern over the lower operational capacity at the ports following the outbreak of Covid-19 and the subsequent countrywide lockdown.

Moshe Motlohi, general manager for corporate affairs and external stakeholders at Transnet National Ports Authority (TNPA), said the port authority had made major inroads in addressing port congestion - especially at the Port of Durban which was now back to around 80% of its operational capacity.

Ports were only operating at about 30% of capacity during the early stages of the Covid-19 lockdown, but Motlohi said capacity had been increased and most ports were now averaging around 65%.

“We are doing everything we can to respond to industry challenges and have instituted daily meetings with all stakeholders, keeping our eye on two areas in particular – stack occupancy and the number of ships waiting outside our ports,” said Motlohi.

He said Transnet Port Terminals (TPT) had been instructed to keep a close eye on cargo types - especially those that were time sensitive such as fruit.

"Yes, there have been inherent challenges when it comes to Covid-19 and there are still challenges, but we want to assure the fruit industry that we will do everything we can to ensure exports are handled efficiently."

Speaking at yesterday's monthly Transport Forum, Werner van Rooyen of the Fresh Produce Exporters' Forum (FPEF), said the citrus industry had only just started and the ports were at present coping with export volumes.

"We are worried going forward. If the current operations at the ports are maintained we will run into trouble when the bigger volumes of citrus start arriving for export," he said.

Siyabulela Mhlaluka, general manager of new business development at TPT, said they were aware of the complexities of fruit exports and were ready to deal with increased volumes.

"We are aware of the opportunities we lost around citrus due to our performance last year. We have done better planning this year and are engaging robustly with the industry to ensure we are better prepared."

Another concern for fruit exports in general, said Van Rooyen, was the shortage of reefer containers - not only in South Africa, but around the world.

As a result of this global scenario breakbulk shipping lines were increasing capacity and frequency to compensate and occupy that vacuum, he said, especially for exports to the UK, EU and Russian markets.

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