

Specialised reefer vessels to speed up SA's citrus exports

By Pieter Dempsey May 19, 2021 at 4:21 pm



Members of the Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa and the crew of MV Cool Eagle in Durban harbour. Photo: Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa

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The *MV Cool Eagle* refrigerated cargo ship, which recently arrived in the Port of Durban, is able to accommodate 60% more fruit than older vessels.

The vessel, chartered by Reefer Alliance, is one of a series of five reefer ships that are regarded as the largest specialised reefers ships in the world.

"Unlike container ships, which transport individual refrigerated containers, specialised reefer ships have insulated holds that can be adjusted according to the type of cargo being shipped," said Mitchell Brooke, logistics development manager at the Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa (CGA).

In a statement, Brooke said the *MV Cool Eagle* was able to carry about 6 000 high-cube pallets of citrus in 342 reefer containers on deck, and 7 200 high cube-pallets below deck. This equated to 1,2 million cartons of citrus, to be transported to export markets.

He added that the vessel was due to leave the Port of Durban to call on the Port Elizabeth and Cape Town harbours before reaching the Port of Rotterdam in the Netherlands by 6 June.

"This is one week ahead of two [other] container ships that will leave Durban at [a similar] time."

Brooke said the ship will be followed closely by its sister ship, *MV Cool Spirit*. "There are three ships a week arriving in South Africa at the moment [to transport citrus], and the *MV Cool Eagle* will return in June."

He added that inefficiencies at South Africa's container terminals had resulted in container ships taking two-thirds longer to clear the country's harbours than reefer vessels, which typically arrived at export markets in Europe a week or two ahead of container vessels.

"These reefer ships therefore guarantee better-quality fruit reaching key markets, which will help South African growers achieve greater market access for their citrus in the future," said Brooke.

Farmer's Weekly previously reported that following a visit to the Port of Durban, President Cyril Ramaphosa announced plans to invest R11 billion in the harbour over the next decade.

Earlier this year Ramaphosa also said in his State of the Nation Address that South Africa's ports were congested and inefficient, and said a complete overhaul of the Port of Durban would be undertaken this year to reduce delays and costs.

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