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Carriers addressing reefer container capacity crunch

23 Aug 2021



With local and global issues having combined to create the perfect storm for shippers battling the capacity crunch, local representatives of shipping lines have assured the industry that they are not taking a back seat and are hard at work to ensure equipment is available at each port.

“In general, shipping schedules locally are upside down as delays are extensive, and this is resulting in many vessels omitting ports or bypassing SA altogether to avoid delays,” says Citrus Growers’ Association (CGA) logistics development manager, Mitchell Brooke. “The routing of empty containers to SA has been problematic up to now, but further impacted by the delays and the bypassing of vessels that were earmarked for bringing empty containers to SA ports.”

However, a fruitful meeting of CGA and Fresh Produce Exporters’ Forum executives and representatives from Maersk and MSC last week to understand their viewpoint, provided welcome reassurance.

“We have learnt that reefer equipment is planned across all lines and aligned for the balance of the citrus season. We can surmise, however, that reefer equipment can become constrained,” says Brooke.

Massive demand for sea freight from east to west, coupled with massive freight rates, has seen container and vessel allocations focusing on those routes. To top that, the recent closure of ports and terminals in China due to Covid, tying up much-needed container equipment, has pushed capacity constraints to the limit.

“Locally we are at boiling point,” says Brooke, “as terminal operations were affected by the July uprising in KZN, and then days later the cyberattack on Transnet IT systems, coupled with severe weather impacts across the port terminals.”

Hopefully carriers will be able to deliver on their commitment.

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