

MSC lauds Phillips for change-making efforts at Transnet

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Managing director for South Africa, Rosario Sarno, during Mediterranean Shipping Company's annual cocktail function.

Amid much criticism aimed at Transnet about nagging concerns plaguing South Africa's port and rail freight network, the state-owned logistics facilitator's CEO, Michelle Phillips, has been lauded for her efforts to improve service delivery to the cargo community.

Speaking at MSC's annual cocktail function on Thursday evening, the shipping line's managing director for South Africa, Rosario Sarno, said although much still needed to be done to improve throughput at the Port of Durban, "she has stabilised the terminal".

He said this was especially evident given recent problematic productivity levels, and how performance had improved overall.

"Last year, before Michelle was confirmed (as CEO), we had one train a day or every two days (on the rail-to-port corridor linking Gauteng with Durban).

"Now we have about five. It's a huge improvement."

Sarno, who is personally involved in much of MSC's day-to-day operational activity, said he had seen for himself how Phillips got involved to get things done.

“She is really doing everything that Transnet can to help our terminals. Every step she is taking, and the decisions she is making, are the best for our country.”

He added that although productivity could still be improved, “she has helped stabilise the system”.

Sarno also commended Earle Peters, managing executive for Durban Terminals.

Sarno said Peters, who often found himself in the crosshairs of irate transporters serving as harbour carriers, disgruntled with container movement at the port, had the hardest job in South Africa. “And I think he is doing exceptional work.”

Sarno also looked back on what has been a historic year for MSC, especially in view of the Medlog 27 034 square-metre cold store facility, which was opened in Cato Manor in March, a global first for the company.

He also highlighted the elections and what the formation of a government of national unity meant for South Africa.

“It’s like poetry,” Sarno said.

“We have great people here in South Africa. If we all work together, imagine what we can achieve.”

MSC SA chairman, Captain Salvatore Sarno, was equally enamoured of Phillips’ achievements.

He said she was the right person to improve Durban’s position in the World Bank’s Container Port Performance Index (CPPI), which has year-on-year flagged the port as one of the worst globally.

That the CPPI is increasingly being flagged itself for its rating methodology, especially in comparing lower-volume ports with high-throughput ports like Durban, is perhaps not important.

What’s more important is that Durban is elevated up the CPPI, and Phillips was the right person to achieve this, he said.

As MSC’s regional director Alex Ferrari pointed out, Sarno said “the world is in turmoil” for a number of reasons – the Red Sea crisis, war in Ukraine, conflict in the Middle East, global warming, cataclysmic climate events, uncertainty over who the next president of the US is going to be, and economic forecasts about markets that are often wrong.

“I prefer not to make predictions,” Sarno said.

Be that as it may, the global liner trade has faced strong headwinds because of out-of-kilter conditions.

“The only thing that we can do is to be the best, or at least try to be the best,” Sarno said.

He recalled that recent correspondence from an angry shipper had served as a reminder of why personal service was important, even at the highest level of MSC’s local operation.

“I received an email from a client saying: ‘Give me only one reason why I should continue shipping with you.’”

Sarno said he had got involved himself, isolated and addressed the problem, and reaffirmed MSC’s policy about call centres.

“We don’t believe in them,” he said.



Captain Ian Rosario of MSC, Transnet CEO Michelle Phillips and her husband, Nigel, and Zane Godwin, also of MSC.



Captain Salvatore Sarno during his speech at the cocktail function.



Tshego Gololo of Contract Forwarding and Schwarzenegger Mbonambi of MSC.



Tracy Schultz of Savino Del Bene, De-Leon van Rooyen of ECU Worldwide, and Dr Juanita Maree, CEO of the South African Association of Freight Forwarders.



Thomas Briggs of Meridian Shipping and Siva Pather of Land and Sea Shipping.



Andrew Thomson of DSV and Juan Enslin of Leschaco.



Martin Keck of SACO and Mornay McLeod of Kuehne + Nagel.



Eskom CEO Dan Marokane and MSC chairman for SA, Captain Salvatore Sarno.

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