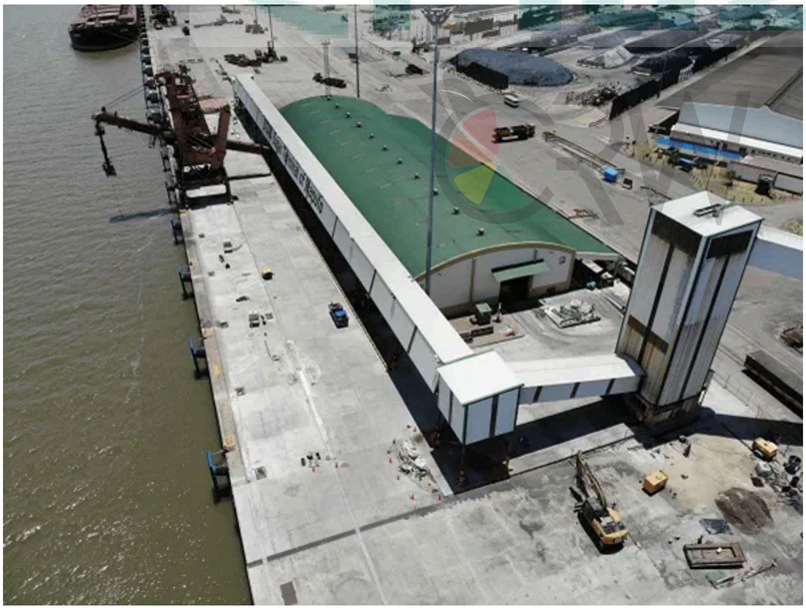
Dawie Scholtz, LBH Mozambique: “In Maputo you can still plan according to the shipping schedule”

Current citrus crop and market dynamics usher Maputo to the fore

Citrus containers loaded from Maputo will dramatically increase this year, says Dawie Scholtz of logistics operator LBH Mozambique. Citrus has been exported through Maputo for several weeks already, and many more containers will move through their gates still, and with very good reason, he says.

"The South African industry is incredibly worried that this year's large crop hanging won't be able to move through Durban, especially pier 2 which handles most containers. There is a whole different climate around Maputo this year, and many more guys are positioning themselves early to come through Maputo."



Maputo Fruit Terminal, Mozambique.

Some of the large, seasoned exporters are sending up to a thousand containers to South Africa's Indian Ocean neighbour this year. The quickest option to the Middle East is the Unifeeder – ONE service, while there are two services for Southeast Asia run respectively by PIL and CMA CGM with Maersk vessels also in rotation.

Last year, Hapag-Lloyd helped out with empty containers during peak season, and also sells bookings for Maputo, as do MSC and CMA CGM to the Middle East.

Vessels do not wait at anchor outside the port, and in Maputo "you can still plan according to the shipping schedule," he remarks.

"The market dynamics look dramatically different this year: the European market isn't as warm as last year, in comparison to Asia. The Red Sea shipping problems have resulted in Egyptian, Moroccan and Spanish fruit finding it difficult to go East, and that's positive for Maputo," he explains. "Also, fruit sizing: last year fruit was very large. This year, fruits are more in the medium and small spectrum, more suitable for the markets we service from here."

He adds that the traffic situation is much smoother with the erection of a large truck stop and the addition of one more lane to the N4 highway around Matola. "We're really pleased to note that traffic is flowing much better than last year."

Maputo cold storage allows accumulation and portside allocation

"I think for medium-sized and smaller operators, Maputo is an unknown and they don't know what to believe from what they're hearing about the border crossing. Then they hear that costs are billed in dollars, and they get a fright," he says, "but Maputo is definitely a potential export corridor for medium and smaller guys who haven't yet taken a bite from this apple."

He says he would welcome enquiries to explain the process step-by-step, showing them why the Maputo option is cost-effective for Middle Eastern and Southeast Asian fruit. Moreover, they have dedicated offices at the KM4 and KM7 borders to help manage delays.

"Say you have two producers close to each other in Marble Hall, or Letsitele, or wherever, they can pool the pallets they have packed for these markets, bring it to us and we can store it here in our coldrooms where it accumulates while we're waiting for their next consignment."

He remarks this is what the large citrus exporters do in any case: they send stock to the Maputo coldrooms, from where they then decide on their market allocations. "That principle to build up volumes exists also for the smaller guys. If you'd like to use Maputo, but you're uncertain and you don't know what to believe from what you hear, please contact me."

MOZAMBIQUE

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