

Second new TNPA tug sets sail for Port Elizabeth

QUNU, the latest of Transnet National Ports Authority's (TNPA) nine new tugboats set sail for the Port of Port Elizabeth from the Durban premises of Southern African Shipyards. Ceremonially launched alongside a third tug, CORMORANT, in May, QUNU is named after the Eastern Cape home village of the former president, the late Nelson Mandela.

She is the second of two new tugs built for the port as part of a large-scale fleet replacement project. The first, MVEZO – named after the Eastern Cape birthplace of Mandela – was unveiled at the port in April by President Jacob Zuma. Valued at R1.4 billion, the nine-tug contract is the largest single contract TNPA has ever awarded to a South African company for the building of harbour craft.

TNPA chief executive, Richard Vallihu, said after the tug's ceremonial launch last year: "The building of these tugs demonstrates that this country has the expertise to compete in the global shipbuilding industry and to use the maritime economy to unlock the economic potential of South Africa, in line with the government's Operation Phakisa initiative."

QUNU will be handed over officially to the port in the coming weeks. Two tugs each will be allocated to the Ports of Durban, Richards Bay and Port Elizabeth, while Saldanha, which handles the largest carriers, would receive three tugs.

Building project



The tug building project kicked off in August 2014 and five tugs are under construction simultaneously at any given time due to the project's tight deadlines.

TNPA programme manager Thandi Mehlo, senior marine engineer, said TNPA had 29 tugs presently in service nationally, but the requirement for more powerful tugboats had increased in line with bigger commercial vessels calling at South African ports more frequently. "TNPA's new fleet will include nine tugs that are 31 metres long with a 70-tonne bollard pull. The older tugs have 32.5 to 40-tonne pulls.

“The increased bollard pull of these new generation tugs meets international standards and they also feature the latest global technology. The tugs have Voith Schneider propulsion which makes them highly manoeuvrable and able to change the direction and thrust almost instantaneously while guiding large vessels safely into our ports,” he said.

Durban based Southern African Shipyards, which owns and operates the largest shipyard in Southern Africa, also built TNPA’s previous 12 tugs. The company scooped the latest contract through an open and transparent process. Its employees have a 12 percent stake in the company, which has 60 percent black ownership.

Subcontractors on the project include well-known multinationals such as Barloworld Equipment, Siemens, Voith Schneider, as well as local contractors such as Bradgary Marine Shopfitters.

Big benefits

CEO Maharaj said his company had created a minimum of 500 direct and 3,500 indirect jobs through the project. “We have also committed to ensuring that each tug has a minimum of 60% locally manufactured components while partnering with international companies on the remaining aspects that cannot be manufactured here, for example, the engines and propulsion units,” he said.

Maharaj said the intention was to maximise local content and spread the benefits of the project to black suppliers, women- and youth-owned businesses. Ultimately South Africa will achieve a socio-economic benefit of more than R800 million as a result of the Supplier Development Plan attached to the contract,” he said.

In addition, a number of national and international training and development opportunities are being created for local employees. TNPA also has a large training programme in place for engineering and deck cadets to ensure that the vessels have skilled people in place to operate them.

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