

The first new TNPA tug has set sail

Headed for its new home at the Port of Port Elizabeth, the first of Transnet National Ports Authority's nine new, powerful tugboats set sail on 2 April 2016 from Southern African Shipyards in Durban. Ceremonially launched as MVEZO last October, the tug arrived in Port Elizabeth in the early hours of Monday, 4 April.



The crew of MVEZO onboard the tug prior to her departure from the Port of Durban.

Port Elizabeth port manager, Rajesh Dana, said: "The arrival of MVEZO in the Eastern Cape is particularly significant given that the tug was named after the small village in our province where former president, the late Nelson Mandela, was born. So in a sense, we really are welcoming her home.

"MVEZO will assist in bolstering the efficiency of our port's marine operations. She will be the first of two new large, powerful tugs planned for our fleet as part of this large-scale contract," he added. The nine-tug contract – valued at R1.4 billion – 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 MVEZO and the eight other tugs in this project, 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."

MVEZO's arrival at the Port of Port Elizabeth will be marked with an official handover ceremony in the coming weeks. Thereafter, there will be handovers every three months until the last tug is launched in early 2018. 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.

Big benefits

The tug building project kicked off in August 2014 and is providing a big boost to the local economy over its 42-month lifespan. Given the project's tight deadlines, five tugs are under construction simultaneously at any given time.

TNPA programme manager Eugene Rappetti, senior manager for Marine Operations, said TNPA had 29 tugs presently in service nationally, but the requirement for bigger, strong tugboat fleets 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-ton bollard pull. The older tugs have 32.5 to 40-ton 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.

CEO Maharaj said his company had created 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.



Brooke Tarin, Southern African Shipyards Technical Manager; Don Arbuckle, TNPA Marine Technical Manager and Thandi Mehlo, TNPA Senior Marine Engineer and Project Manager.

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, with TNPA already set to send employees to Germany for training on the new propulsion units. They would also receive training locally for four to six weeks. Rappetti said TNPA also had a large training programme in place for engineering and deck cadets to ensure that the vessels had skilled people in place to operate them.

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