

## Exporters warn Cape Town port delays risk missing shipping gains

Exporters Western Cape has called for improved efficiency and coordination at the Port of Cape Town, warning that global shipping disruptions will not automatically translate into local economic gains.



Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#)

The call follows an industry engagement where shipping expert Brian Ingpen and Louis Niemand highlight both the opportunity and the constraints facing the region's maritime economy.

### Opportunity driven by shifting global routes

According to EWC chairman Terry Gale, geopolitical tensions in the Middle East have increased vessel traffic around the Cape of Good Hope, but the local port is not fully capitalising on the shift.

“The current situation in the Middle East has resulted in more vessels moving around the Cape of Good Hope, but we are not yet fully leveraging that,” he said.

Ingpen noted that even under normal conditions, a significant number of vessels pass the Cape without stopping.

“If we can entice even 10 ships a day to come into port to bunker, we will make money and start filling empty berths. The financial potential of a bunkers-only ship is significant. One vessel can leave behind at least a million rand, excluding the fuel. You bring a ship in to bunker and yes, you sell fuel, but they always need something else. That is where the real value comes in.”

### Infrastructure and operational constraints

While upgrades have been made at the Port of Cape Town — including new cranes, additional straddle carriers and a deepened container basin — stakeholders say efficiency gains have not yet matched expectations.

Ingpen said unlocking the opportunity will require addressing constraints such as fuel availability, turnaround times and cost competitiveness.

“There is an urgent need to expand container handling facilities, improve the positioning of infrastructure like the reefer stack and invest in additional gantry cranes to speed up operations. The ship turnaround time will be much more rapid,” he said.

He added that opportunities extend beyond bunkering to ship repair services, provided capacity and infrastructure are improved.

### **Cruise sector highlights potential**

The growing cruise industry offers a glimpse of what is possible under the right conditions, contributing an estimated \$2bn to Cape Town each season through passenger spend and associated services such as provisioning and refuelling.

Recent geopolitical disruptions have further increased Cape Town’s visibility as vessels reroute around conflict-affected regions.

### **Global uncertainty adds pressure**

Niemand said global market conditions have shifted rapidly, driven by conflict in the Middle East and instability around key shipping routes such as the Strait of Hormuz.

“The news flow changes every single day in terms of whether the Strait is open or not and markets are moving between 5% and 10% every time things change. At the same time, the oil price is not going back to \$60 per barrel in the short term, which means structurally higher inflation and interest rates are not coming down anymore,” he said.

He added that South Africa remains particularly vulnerable due to its reliance on imported oil and sensitivity to currency fluctuations.

“South Africa is highly sensitive to oil prices and a weaker rand. When global uncertainty rises, you get both at the same time and that is a double negative for the economy. Our inflation pressure is not coming from strong growth, it’s coming from external shocks.”

Gale said that while global dynamics are beyond South Africa’s control, local performance is not.

“We cannot control global events, but we can control how we respond. The opportunity is there, but it requires decisive action and improved efficiency. Working together, we can drive change now.”