

Global leader Maersk on board, hears Regulator

Container hub controversy

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MAERSK, the largest container ship and supply vessel operator in the world, has backed Siyakhapuka Investment Holdings to establish a fully functional container terminal at the Port of Richards Bay.

This was told to the Ports Regulator in Durban on Thursday during an appeal hearing against Transnet National Ports Authority (TNPA).

Siyakhapuka is challenging TNPA's decision to deny the investor a concession to operate container facilities at the local harbour – a proposal first made seven years ago.

Since then, Siyakhapuka Managing Director Jan Scheepers said Transnet has made numerous objections against containerised services 'without reason or adherence to the National Ports Act'.

The group presented the Regulator with its plans for the development with strong support from Maersk.

According to Siyakhapuka, they identified Richards Bay's need for the facilities in 2005 and headed into a long process of negotiations with the shipping conglomerate.

'After more than two years of negotiations, it resulted in an agreement relating to Richards Bay,' said the group in its submission document.

'Maersk Line would include the Port of Richards Bay into their international container hub system, provided that an efficient container terminal at Richards Bay would service their vessels, operating within their hub system.'

'As a consequence Maersk Line nominated the sister company in the group, APM Terminals, as a partner in the funding to develop and operate a terminal suitable to fit in the Maersk Line hub system.'

APM Terminals and Siyakhupuka also sponsored ten young black Zululanders for one year training in terminal operations at the University of Montana in the United States at a cost of some R6-million.

No comment

Scheepers said the terminal would have a massively positive impact on the regional and national economy.

'It would solve the development blockage in Zululand; secure funding and partnership for development; provide an emergency alternative for container exports and imports

through Durban; open new export markets for Zululand and create thousands of jobs.

'The establishment of global container shipping connections will be the single biggest event since the construction of the port.'

Despite his strong case and countless appeals from industry and municipal leaders, Transnet has maintained Richards Bay operations must focus on its four main activities – exporting coal, break-bulk, dry bulk and liquid bulk.

In response to questions relating to the hearing, TNPA said the group is not allowed to comment until the Regulator has reached a verdict.

'This matter is presently sub-judice and it is against the law for TNPA to engage publicly around it,' the authority said in a statement.

'We are therefore unable to respond to such questions except before the Regulator.'

The Regulator is currently considering cases made from both parties on Thursday and Friday and is expected to respond with its decision on 5 and 6 May.

Siyakhapuka has also referred the matter to the Competition Commission with the belief TNPA practices 'anti-competitive behaviour'. This too is currently under review.