

TNPA marking 20 years of maritime transformation

[Durban, South Africa, 2 September 2020] Throughout September 2020, port landlord Transnet National Ports Authority (TNPA) will commemorate its 20th year of existence and the impact its ambitious programme to foster transformation of the maritime industry has had on South Africa's commercial ports.

The celebratory programme will coincide with the country's Heritage Month and the global commemoration of World Maritime Day on 24 September, under the theme "Sustainable shipping for a sustainable planet".

Commemorative activities lined up by TNPA include several webinars catering for stakeholders from school learners to industry leaders, as well as a special virtual celebration to reflect on the maritime transformation legacy and celebrate Heritage Day and World Maritime Day.

TNPA Acting Chief Operating Officer, Captain Rufus Lekala, said, "As we look back on 20 years with TNPA as an operating division of Transnet, it is with great pride that we reflect on our achievements to transform our maritime resources. TNPA has replaced and built new infrastructure, replaced and grown its fleet and developed its mariners and personnel to ensure we're able to handle new generation vessels and to compete effectively in an increasingly competitive global market."

The National Ports Authority was formed in 2000, when Transnet's then single port division, Portnet, was split into landlord and operator businesses. Sister division Transnet Port Terminals, then called South African Port Operations, became the division responsible for terminal operations, while TNPA's focus has been port infrastructure and marine services, including its Real Estate business.

Over the last two decades TNPA has carved out a transformation legacy in the maritime sector, dating back to September 1999 when the first group of 12 Black trainees embarked on a training programme in Rotterdam aimed at bringing in a new generation of marine pilots, managers and other marine professionals.

At the time, Transnet's seafarers were predominantly expats, mostly White and there had been little investment into Black South Africans.

TNPA's transformation efforts were led by Commander Tsietsi Mokhele, who had returned to South Africa to head up the naval integration stream tasked with the transformation and repositioning of the South African navy as part of the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) process. He was subsequently appointed as Transformation Manager at Transnet in 1999, with the mandate of positioning the country's maritime sector as part of the global maritime space.

Commander Mokhele's initiatives to reposition Transnet's waterside business for commercial success included development of a talent pool for the future through a fast-tracked marine pilot training programme designed to address the skills shortage in South Africa, which was also a massive problem worldwide. Twelve candidates, now known as the "Class of 1999," embarked on the inaugural training programme in Rotterdam that would deliver the marine pilots, port control and aids to navigation specialists, as well as the harbour masters of the future.

Today, after years of ongoing training, development, hard work and dedication, many of that first group from the Class of 1999 have progressed to senior leadership positions in the South African port system. TNPA has also taken a lead globally with women ascending to leadership positions, as Port Managers, Harbour Masters, Deputy Harbour Masters and across all areas of the business.

"Despite initial resistance from an industry reluctant to change, TNPA has been steadfast in its efforts to foster transformation," he said. "We are thankful to count among our maritime leadership many men and women who were the first of their kind and have worked tirelessly, often against the tide, to prepare our ports for a sustainable future," said Captain Lekala.

TNPA's programme of activities in September includes:

2 September – Webinar: Maritime Education & Career Paths – for learners

9 September – Webinar: The maritime sector in the 4th Industrial Revolution & Beyond – for industry

23 September – Virtual Celebration to mark 20 years of maritime transformation, Heritage Day and World Maritime Day

30 September - Webinar: Navigation through Crisis – for industry

Ends

About Transnet National Ports Authority

Transnet National Ports Authority (TNPA) is one of six operating divisions of Transnet SOC Ltd. The National Ports Authority is responsible for the safe, effective and efficient economic functioning of the national port system, which it manages in a landlord capacity. It provides port infrastructure and marine services at the eight commercial seaports in South Africa – Richards Bay, Durban, Saldanha, Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, East London, Mossel Bay and Ngqura. It operates within a legislative and regulatory environment and is governed by the National Ports Act (Act No. 12 of 2005). For more information visit www.transnetnationalportsauthority.net.

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