TNPA’S MARITIME TRANSFORMATION LEGACY
As we look back on 20 years of Transnet National Ports Authority (TNPA) and the contribution towards South Africa’s social and economic milieu, it is with great pride that we introduce this book.

This a collection of real-life stories from extraordinary people who have transcended their circumstances to serve our country. These ordinary South Africans have shown us the ability to look beyond our immediate surroundings and re-imagine a better South Africa for all.

In an ever-changing global landscape that has been disrupted by environmental factors, economic volatility and a pandemic that has changed the way we think about working safely – the institutional knowledge gained over the years by these women and men is invaluable.

The women and men in this book are people who have worked hard to ensure that they make a meaningful contribution to the South African economy and their communities. Some started their journeys as taxi drivers, cadets or shorehands, and have worked tirelessly, often against the tide, to change perceptions in an industry that was sometimes reluctant to change.

Others fought against gender stereotypes and undertook maritime journeys even when they were the first women to work aboard ships, often alone with otherwise entirely male crews. They have helped redefine the industry and in so doing, have allowed TNPA to lead the global shift towards gender equity in the maritime industry. Mostly though, in all corners of the country, young people, both male and female, now know that they too can conquer the seas.

These men and women opened the door for others and subsequent generations who have since joined our ranks. We salute them for the pioneering role that they have played in driving change in South Africa’s maritime space.

As we look to the future, we place our trust in their capacity as change agents, to herald a new digital future for African shipping and logistics. These ordinary extraordinary South Africans have broadened our worlds and shown us new horizons. For this we salute them.

This book is a celebration of their triumphs, unwavering commitment and determination to navigate through uncharted waters. We hope that it also serves as a reminder of what can be achieved by those who are willing to break boundaries.
The history of our operating division does not belong to the organisation alone. It is made up of the life stories of hundreds of hardworking individuals whose dedication has led to the worldwide recognition we have the privilege to claim as TNPA.

Much like the waters upon which we operate, the past few decades have had it all – rough seas in the form of uncertainty and the smooth sailing that is commercial growth.

Through it all, our development and transformation as a national entity has been an exciting journey that has changed the demographics of the maritime industry forever.

We remain a fairly young democracy and the strides we have made in the past 20 years in the face of difficulties, must be showcased as a point of pride.

As is human nature, we tend to celebrate the bigger accomplishments – the advent of ground-breaking technology, the upgrades to our infrastructure, including the birth of a new, green port and the acquisition of a world-class fleet of dredgers and tugs.

In this publication, while we acknowledge these advances, we pay homage to TNPA’s first group of mariners who broke through the boundaries of colour and gender. We recognise the many sacrifices they made to achieve the positions they occupy today and celebrate the spirit they so clearly embody.

Their personal stories are a source of pride and inspiration. They include the Shorehand who would become a harbour master, the young man who couldn’t swim, but joined the Navy as a way out of poverty and the young seafarer who stood her ground in a male-dominated industry so that she could become TNPA’s first female harbour master.

These stories and experiences are testament to the strength and fortitude of our greatest asset – our people.
MasterMinding TNPA's Maritime Transformation

Commander Tsietsi understood what was needed to help the country move the maritime sector forward.

The last few decades have seen huge changes in terms of vessel size and capacity which have required major upgrades to port infrastructure, fleet, processes and systems, in addition to training and developing human resources to meet the demands of the rapidly evolving shipping industry.

TRANSFORMING OUR FLEET

Along with developing, improving and replacing our infrastructure, TNPA has invested billions in new additions to the fleet, including more powerful tugs to meet the needs of larger vessels, as well as new dredgers to address the impact of climate change on our ports.

THE PORT OF NGQURA

No port is a greater reflection of TNPA's new era than the Port of Ngqura.

TRANSFORMING MARITIME TRAINING

Personnel development has been at the centre of TNPA's journey of transforming its marine department and the maritime sector at large. TNPA began its transformation journey in 1999 when it selected twelve candidates for a training programme in Rotterdam that would deliver the marine pilots and harbour masters of the future.

"IF IT CAN BE DONE. IT WILL BE DONE"

Commander Tsietsi Mokhele's Reflections

10 13 14 18 23 24 26
The Class of 99, many of whom are leaders in our ports today, was a group of resourceful, intelligent and fearless leaders from disadvantaged backgrounds who grasped every opportunity to develop their maritime careers.

CAPTAIN RUFUS LEKALA
From Taxi Driver to Chief Harbour Master

STRIVING FOR GENDER EQUITY
Gender transformation in numbers.

CAPTAIN NONTSINDISO TSHAZI
TNPA’s First Female Harbour Master

TAKING TRANSFORMATION TO THE SKIES
The programme of transformation of the aviation services undertaken by Captain Lekala has been a game changer not just enabling TNPA to deliver this service in-house, but changing the lives of a new generation of skilled professionals, who are passionate and committed about being the best they can be.

TRAINING IN MARINE OPERATIONS

MARITIME CULTURE AT TNPA
INTEGRATED PORT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

TRANSFORMING AND INTEGRATING OUR COMMUNITIES
FACING THE CHALLENGES
For some, that pivotal trip to Rotterdam would ignite a passion for piloting that would never fade. Marine Pilots Devan Pulliah, Sabelo Xulu and Ashley Bergstedt can all attest to the pull of the ocean's currents.
MARINE PILOT
ASHLEY BERGSTEDT
Positive Change

EPHRAIM KESA
Shift Manager, Port of Durban
The Future is Bright

ERIC NKOSI
Capacity Creation Manager, Port of Durban
Building Capacity

CAPTAIN ALEX MIYA
Harbour Master: Port of Cape Town
From Shorehand to Harbour Master

CAPTAIN BRYNN ADAMSON
Harbour Master: Port of Port Elizabeth
It was Written in the Stars

CAPTAIN THULANI DUBEKO
Harbour Master: Port of Ngqura
Changing Lives

CAPTAIN SABEO MDLALOSE
Harbour Master: Port of Durban
Providing Hope and Inspiration
We salute the fallen heroes and those who have since left TNPA, who also contributed to the struggle for transformation in the organisation and made it a better organisation to work for.
South Africa’s ports have a history spanning several centuries, starting with the voyages of discovery in the 15th century.

A number of South Africa’s natural bays in the then Cape Colony and Natal were developed over time into ports that formed gateways between South Africa and the rest of the world.

In 1910, the South Africa Act was passed in Britain which brought these two colonies and the Republics of the Transvaal and Orange Free State together as the Union of South Africa.

The country’s leaders were adamant that the railways and harbours should be used to unify and develop South Africa’s economy and the South African Railways & Harbours (SAR&H) was established as a proud arm of the government.

Apart from supporting the growing international maritime trade, our ports played an important role protecting our coastline and as transit ports for troops during the second world war. During the 1970s it was decided by the government that SAR&H should be restructured along defined business lines.

In 1981 the state business enterprise was renamed South African Transport Services (SATS) with separate divisions for railway, harbour, road transport, aviation and pipeline operations.

On 1 April 1990, after 80 years of government and parliamentary control, SATS was given company status. A new limited-liability company representing a vast transport network was finally born. Its name was Transnet SOC Ltd.

At that time Transnet had a single port division, Portnet. In 2000 Portnet split into two separate operating divisions: the National Ports Authority handling the landlord business and South African Port Operations handling terminal operations.

From 2004 Transnet began restructuring from a diversified conglomerate into a focused bulk freight transport provider. The aim was to reposition Transnet to respond adequately to the government’s economic challenges, growth prospects and customer needs.

This led to the introduction of a new brand in 2007 to signal a focused, integrated and revitalised Transnet.

Transnet National Ports Authority (TNPA) is one of six operating divisions of Transnet SOC Ltd. It is responsible for the safe, effective and efficient economic functioning of the national port system, which it manages in a landlord capacity. TNPA provides port infrastructure and marine services at the eight commercial seaports in South Africa, operating within a legislative and regulatory environment created by the National Ports Act 2004 (Act no. 12 of 2005).

Our single most important purpose is to facilitate international trade to support the economy of South Africa.
The last few decades have seen huge changes in terms of vessel size and capacity which have required major upgrades to port infrastructure, fleet, processes and systems, in addition to training and developing human resources to meet the demands of the rapidly evolving shipping industry.

The largest container vessel in 1997 had a capacity of 7226 Twenty Foot Equivalent Units (TEUs). The largest container vessel in 2020 is the HMM Algeciras which has over three times that capacity at 23,964 TEUs, with a length of 400 metres, width of 61 metres and draft of 16.5 metres.

TNPA has transformed its maritime resources, replaced and built new infrastructure, replaced and grown its fleet and developed its marine personnel to ensure that the organisation is able to handle new generation vessels and compete effectively in an increasingly competitive global market.

In addition to meeting the challenges presented by bigger vessels carrying far greater volumes of cargo than ever before, our ports are also dealing with the impact of climate change, which has resulted in more frequent adverse weather conditions and deadly storms.

Among the larger infrastructure projects undertaken by TNPA to ensure that our ports continue to serve the South African economy were the widening of the Durban entrance channel from 120m to 220m in 2005, the new Pier 1 Container Terminal in 2007, and the new deep-water Port of Ngqura commissioned in 2009, which has become one of the fastest growing ports on the African continent.

Ageing infrastructure, such as the quay walls and berths at Maydon Wharf and Island View in the Port of Durban, has been replaced to ensure safe and efficient operations.
The Mastermind behind TNPA’s Maritime transformation was Commander Tsietsi Mokhele, who returned to South Africa to head up the Naval Integration Process within the Transitional Executive Council, which resulted from the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) process. As part of the process resulting from the historic democratic elections of 1994, he joined the South African Navy with the rank of Commander, tasked with ensuring the implementation of the pre-election agreed change processes and to lead the transformation of the South African Navy.

In 1999 he was headhunted by Transnet into its comprehensive Port Management entity, Portnet, to spearhead the transformation of its waterside maritime services entities. Transnet was in the process of separating Portnet into two operating divisions, the now Transnet Port Terminals (TPT) and Transnet National Ports Authority (TNPA). While the organisation had developed sufficient knowledge capacity and was making progress in terms of the terminal operations, it did not have the expertise to transform the waterside of the business and position the business for the future.

There had been no significant investment in human resources, infrastructure or technical systems at South Africa’s ports for 20 years – the last major investment being the establishment of the Port of Richards Bay. The business lacked in demographic diversity, was light-years behind modern port management practices, and still based on a dated dysfunctional ‘comprehensive port management’ business model. The legal, statutory, and regulatory policy instruments on South African ports were at odds with the global evolution which the industry had already undergone since the 1960s.

Adjusting Course

Having been part of the Transitional Executive Council during the CODESA process, Commander Mokhele understood the policy levers that would help the country move the sector forward. One of the first things he did was to conduct a job and skills profiling exercise, which revealed that almost all of the company’s seafarers were White - mainly expats - and there had been little investment into developing talent in South Africans, White and Black in the maritime services.
The transformation roadmap necessary to reposition the maritime business in the prevailing competitive ports landscape was based primarily on four interlocking pillars of the new competitive business model: investment in and renewal of the Human Resources, Infrastructure Systems, Market and Customer Relations Processes, and Policy and Regulatory Frameworks.

“The job profiling wasn’t only about racial diversification but repositioning the waterside business for commercial success. It was leaking money. We simply did not have the right talent pool for the future. We were also operating tugboats that were built in the sixties, did not have the right infrastructure and technology to be competitive, and as a traditional state-owned company with the protection of Government, were not focused on efficiency and competitiveness.”

The world had run into a massive shortage of personnel with high-end deep-sea qualifications, yet the business sought to utilise that as prerequisites for port-based roles such as tug masters and marine pilots. “At the time it took about 15 years to become a Class 1 Captain or Chief Engineer, and you were required to be 28 years old before you could commence your practical training to become a tug master, and take the first step towards becoming a marine pilot. The business needed to break out of the unworkable skills and training quandary it found itself in.”

“Fortunately, there were some old sea hands in marine operations and management, albeit very few, who recognised the need to bring in a new generation of tug masters, marine pilots and marine managers to take the business forward and who realised that time was not on our side. One of them was Captain Rick van der Krol, the then Executive Manager: Marine Services, who pledged his support and helped us overcome the resistance we experienced from the rest of the business.”

Commander Mokhele recognised that a fast-tracked marine pilot training programme was required urgently. For the programme to be a success, he needed the support of an international training partner to satisfy the global market perceptions, as captains of the ships calling into South African ports would be reluctant to hand over their vessels, unless they were assured of the competency of the attendant marine personnel. Portnet chose Shipping and Transport Training Company (STC) in Holland, which at the time was one of the foremost marine training institutions in the world and was an early adopter of simulation for the training of mariners. The Dutch government provided the initial financial support for the programme.

The fast-tracked training also necessitated policy changes to the requirements, and changes to roles and titles to align with global benchmarks so that the company’s marine personnel could be measured against and meet international standards. In order to create the legal, regulatory policy space for the transformation, Marine Services worked on new corporate policies, repealing the Harbour Regulations whilst developing the current Port Rules, contributing to the current National Ports Policy and later the National Ports Act.

By the time the Class of 99 – the first group to receive fast-tracked marine pilot training – went to Rotterdam, the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) through its International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping as amended in 1995 (STCW 95) had determined that simulator based training would be credited as time spent on a ship.

The Class of 99 was coming into a business that was, in commercial terms, technically insolvent. They had to be equipped with management skills to understand the economics and appreciate that their job was not about steering ships and tugboats but was fundamentally about facilitating and moving trade. They had to appreciate that they were to be part of the global system of Maritime Transport, Logistics and Trade.
Meeting Resistance Head On

On their return from Rotterdam they met with a lot of resistance from the old guard of tug masters, marine pilots and managers, who historically would have spent many more years at sea before getting their own licences. They sought to undermine the transformation by approaching the courts, complaining to their unions, the company’s customers and suppliers, international insurance and shipping fraternity – advising that Portnet was employing poorly trained, inexperienced, under-qualified young, Black people and women as tug masters and marine pilots and in marine management, putting vessels, cargo and the marine environment at risk.

So intense was their resistance campaign that Commander Mokhele and team had to approach the London insurance market to explain Portnet’s vision, strategy and plans for the marine transformation programme. Presentations were made to multitudes of the underwriters covering the Transnet marine business risk to explain how the changes were necessary for the future of the country’s port industry. Lloyds thought the story was too good to be true and sent their chief broker to South Africa in 2002 to verify the facts. So impressed were they with the programme, and counter to the global trends in the immediate aftermath of September 11, 2001, they rewarded South Africa with reduced premiums. “Our strategy had received the nod of approval from the global insurance market; transformation had become a mainstream strategic business imperative.”

Out with the Old, In with New Infrastructure and Technology

“Another big change that was necessary was the acquisition of new assets and infrastructure, such as tugboats and port control systems. Whereas the rest of the world was using tugboats that could be manned by as few as three people, Transnet had tugboats manned by 13-18 people including cooks and cleaners – on a boat tied alongside the jetty for 20 hours a day, operating within line of sight!”

“I literally chucked out the old tugboats and our current design of new tugboats were designed and contracted to be built in South Africa. The new tugboats introduced into the fleet were some of the most modern internationally and only required crews of four or five. Built in Durban by an empowered, proudly South African ship building yard with South African expertise, SAFBUILD, now Southern African Shipyards. The new tugboats were to be operated by a new generation of tug masters, predominantly Black youth, and women, enabling an inspired transformation of the entire port system.”

“*We also needed new blood in Marine Engineering to maintain the fleet and there were none, so we sought out young people in the mechanical engineering field that we could transform into mariners.*"
Piloting Gender Transformation

In terms of Human Resources, by this time the National Ports Authority also had the most successful demographic and gender transformation programme in technical services anywhere in Transnet; consequently, the Department of Transport was seeking us out for advice and learnings, having in mind the transformation of South Africa’s aviation services.

Our trainees were cross-trained – technical staff received commercial education, while commercial personnel were trained to understand relevant technical aspects. We produced some of the most rounded expertise in port operations and management. Many of them are today in executive leadership throughout the Transnet Ports businesses, the broader maritime industry and corporate South Africa.

Sailing to Success

Marine Services had to align its transformation programme to the needs of the domestic and international markets and clients, with a demonstrable radical shift and improvement in competitiveness, efficiency, and overall performance. By 2005, the business confidence in the effect of the changes implemented made it possible for the business to enact the new Stakeholder and Customer Relations Management Model (CRM), engaging with the market on new competitive service levels and entering into performance based contracts.

“One meeting which comes to mind was with Captain Salvatore Sarno, Chairman of Mediterranean Shipping Company (MSC), one of the largest shipping companies in the world. The goal was to engage the no nonsense head of MSC and offer them the new Docking System based on a differentiated No–Delay, Slot System, with the goal that they would be the first to adopt the system.” After much wrangling, Captain Sarno finally agreed to subscribe all MSC ships calling in the South African ports to the system, at 50% more than the prevailing tariff. Mokhele recalls the Captain estimating that the system would save him the costs equivalent to about 13 ship-calls a month.

“All of the measures we put in place, driven by the new generation of Port Mariners, were so successful that by 2005, a financial turnaround of over 500% had been achieved. The business was commercially viable, recording substantial profit, with the highest safety record in operations in years. In recognition of the success of the programme, many in the Marine Team scooped the corporate awards such as Inkanyezi Top Performers, CEO’s Eagle Awards and beyond Transnet, nationally and internationally during the 2003/2005 period. The Class of 99 was starting to show the shine. They showed their mettle.”

The Marine Services now generating a profit, while efficiently and safely facilitating South Africa’s international trade with new diversified talent and modern infrastructure assets, marked the success of the entire business transformation process, setting the scene for the future of the business. The journey to world-class was well underway.
Along with developing, improving and replacing our infrastructure, TNPA has invested billions in new additions to the fleet, including more powerful tugs to meet the needs of larger vessels, as well as new dredgers to address the impact of climate change on our ports.

Rough seas and adverse weather conditions require us to dredge faster and more often to ensure that channel entrances and berths are to depth.

Our achievements in terms of fleet replacement include:

2000 -2011 – Seven tugs built in South Africa for TNPA by Southern African Shipyards, demonstrating South Africa’s ability to compete in the global shipbuilding industry

2002/3 – The introduction of the first helicopter marine pilot transfer service in the world

2010 – A new trailing suction hopper dredger - Isandlwana with a capacity of 5000 m³

2014 – A new grab hopper dredger - Italeni with a capacity of 750 m³

2015 - A second trailing suction hopper dredger - Ilembe with a capacity of 5500 m³

2016 - 2019 – Nine powerful Voith Schneider tugs built in South Africa by Southern African Shipyards at a cost of R1.4 billion

June 2019 - Two new Agusta 109 SP helicopters to replace helicopters at the Ports of Durban and Richards Bay.

During 2019 TNPA also made the decision to extend its helicopter marine pilot transfer service to the Port of Cape Town, where service is disrupted during adverse weather when it is unsafe to transfer pilots from pilot boats.
No port is a greater reflection of TNPA’s new era than the Port of Ngqura.

Opened in 2009, the organisation’s youngest and only “green” port, represents the future of TNPA. A world-class deep-water port situated within a Special Economic Zone (SEZ), the Port of Ngqura, near Port Elizabeth, provides a global transhipment hub, ideally positioned in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Safe and Efficient

The port has proved to be a popular, safe and efficient option for container shipping lines catering to West and East African, as well as European and Asian trade routes. Currently, the port handles just over 6 million tonnes of cargo per year – an estimated 400 vessel calls – with a 30-year forecast predicting up to 110 million tonnes of cargo per year.

Over the years, the port’s purpose has expanded, largely due to its world-class infrastructure, depth and marine services, with more opportunities arising, including the handling of abnormal cargo such as wind turbines. The port also serves the industrial bulk commodity requirements of the regional and national hinterland and provides additional services to visiting ships.

State-of-the-Art

The port’s state-of-the-art port administration building, eMendi, is a concrete example of TNPA’s commitment to sustainability. The green concepts incorporated in the architecture are ground-breaking for TNPA, and include rainwater harvesting, solar panels and light motion sensors, while large windows take advantage of the port’s panoramic views and reduce the need for electrical lighting.

In line with its pioneering backstory, the port is also one of three in the system to boast female leadership – Port Manager, Tandi Lebakeng.

Environmental Significance

The Port of Ngqura is located in a geographic region of environmental significance and must therefore adhere to environmental authorisation or Record of Decision (RoD) policy.

Long-term Goals

As the fastest growing port in Africa continues to expand its service offering to accommodate dry bulk, break bulk, liquid bulk and project cargo, TNPA’s long-term intention is to turn the Port of Ngqura into a global leader in manganese ore exports and an energy hub through the import of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG).
Personnel development has been at the centre of TNPA’s journey of transforming its marine department and the maritime sector at large. TNPA began its transformation journey in 1999 when it selected twelve candidates for a training programme in Rotterdam that would deliver the marine pilots and harbour masters of the future.

Fast-tracked training was introduced to address a critical shortage of marine pilots in South Africa at the time, as well as the need for transformation under a democratic government. Up until then the only way to obtain a first-class ticket involved years in the classroom and at sea, understudying qualified personnel for a number of years with no documented practical assessments.

TNPA recognised it had candidates who had relevant practical experience as tug masters manoeuvring vessels in and out of our ports and that this would have prepared them well for their development into marine pilots.

The Class of 99 who undertook the pilot programme in Rotterdam, came from previously disadvantaged backgrounds and were the ground breakers who would lead the transformation of TNPA’s marine services.

Developed in collaboration with South African Maritime Safety Authority (SAMSA), the programme saw tug masters completing a bridging course and undertaking simulator training as well as practical training at sea on a training vessel, helping them to qualify as marine pilots in a shorter period than the traditional first class ticket.

**The Class of 99** - a group of resourceful, intelligent, fearless leaders, from disadvantaged backgrounds who grasped every opportunity to develop their maritime careers - would go further than they ever dreamed possible at the time.
Members of the first groups to receive fast-tracked training who made it to the top, demonstrated an extraordinary work ethic and embraced the attitude that “If it can be done, it will be done.”

They were mature and resilient from having spent long times at sea as Cadets and Officers, toughened to go the distance in the face of stiff resistance from the status quo, always embracing the opportunities that came their way. Commander Mokhele recounts these examples of how they broke through the barriers.

An Overnight Adventure with Captain Lekala

Captain Rufus Lekala, who began his working life as a taxi driver, was at that time, a trainee marine pilot in the Port of East London. The Harbour Master had assured Commander Mokhele that he was doing very well and was competent but, for some strange reason, apparently in response to the resistance of the reluctant port’s serving marine pilots, had not granted him his licence. The marine pilots in the port, who did not want to accept the new generation of marine pilots, did not turn up for duty. Commander Mokhele viewed this as a deliberate measure to play leverage and undermine the system. Ships were waiting for service and the crew was nowhere to be seen.

“I insisted that the Port Captain issue Captain Lekala his marine pilot open licence that very night so that he could keep the port open and handle ships awaiting service that night. And so it was that Captain Lekala got his licence and brought the vessel in at the Port of East London. But the story does not end there. The pilots in the Port of Port Elizabeth were also on undeclared strike, so once Captain Lekala was back on the ground, on learning about the shortage of marine pilots in Port Elizabeth, he jumped in his car and drove through the night to assist in Port Elizabeth.

On arrival in the morning, without any rest, he got straight to work and navigated an awaiting ship into port. Lo and behold, the ship that he ended up on was the same that he had sailed out of East London the night earlier. ‘The Captain of the vessel must have thought he was seeing a ghost,’ remarks Commander Mokhele.

That is the Legacy of the Class of 1999.

Breaking the Strike

In Port Elizabeth, the business had retained a fleet of the last remaining Z-Peller type tugboats in the port system. This technology was outdated and had been for decades; only Port Elizabeth marine pilots could at the time competently handle those tugboats. When the White union decided to counter the transformation process, taking an unprecedented step for the Marine Service, they declared a local strike. The strikers had chosen
a day to go on strike when there would be a high volume of ships calling in the port.

As a result, there were very few people in the entire system either willing to turn on their peers or able to handle the Z-Peller tugboats. The only option was to appeal to the newly qualified tug masters and marine pilots, supported by a few of the experienced volunteer crews to intervene. As none could operate the Z-Pellers, their only option was to sail the Durban tugboats - with which they were familiar - non-stop overnight to Port Elizabeth in order to service shipping and keep the port open. Our new generation of tug masters and marine pilots set sail out of Durban around 20:00 that night. Up until then none of the newly qualified crews had ever participated in inter-port voyages and had only taken tugs in and out the harbour. Stressed and anxious, I asked Captain Neil Chetty, one of the few Black South Africans among the older generation of experienced pilots, who had helped enormously in the training of the Class of 99 marine pilots, if we could entrust the tugboats to these young newly qualified Mariners to safely sail the long voyage, at night, between Durban and Port Elizabeth. His response was, “I have never been more sure in my life. Let them sail, Commander”

They sailed non-stop the whole night, along the notoriously perilous South African coast, to arrive in Port Elizabeth with ships lined up at anchorage with no pilots in sight. There was no time to rest or familiarise themselves with the local conditions. They immediately got to work towing ships into the harbour and handling the outbound sailings, setting a new record for the number of vessel moves per day in that port. The Class of 99 had earned its mettle. I salute Captain Neil Chetty and the other volunteer mentors.

The transformation Return On Investment (ROI) yield was unprecedented.

### Overcoming Gender Bias

If the prejudice, discrimination and racism was hard for the entire Class of 99, it was worse for the women on the programme. The few women on the programme were subjected to humiliation, insults and such unacceptable treatment that special measures were necessary to enable them to complete their training. Two cases come to mind:

**Captain Nontsindiso Tshazi (Ms)**

Ms Tshazi, known as Nontsi, started her working life as a domestic worker then completed her maritime studies at Durban University of Technology (DUT). She had sailed with Unicorn Lines before qualifying as a Third Officer and being placed for tug master training in the Port of Richards Bay. Proving herself to be hard-working and focussed, the maritime field was a lifeline for her. She excelled in her training but was not getting to a point of being declared competent and issued her ticket.

I was furnished with a typed formal progress report, written by her mentor and Port Captain. The glowing report detailed her pleasant personality, positive attitude to others and hard work. However, a handwritten report by the same author, dated the same day, was leaked, landing on my desk. It painted the opposite picture, portraying Ms Tshazi as incompetent, lazy and not deserving of the opportunity; it went on to recommend that she be terminated or given a lowly secretarial function in the business. I was horrified and livid at this gross treacherous and unprofessional conduct by her mentor and senior officer in the business who was clearly poised to undermine the transformation programme. I dismissed the mentor and redeployed Ms Tshazi to be placed in Durban under another mentor.

A few weeks later when checking on her progress, her new mentor, an older experienced tug master Captain Derrick Pillay indicated that he was perplexed by the move to place her under training as he regarded her as very competent and confident in handling the tug jobs. He immediately recommended that she be issued with her ticket without delay.

Ms Tshazi obtained her ticket to operate independently as a tug master. She went on to carry out her duties diligently, growing to become a marine pilot, the first female harbour master in South Africa and the world, and the Board Member on the international Association on Lighthouses and Marine Aids to Navigation (IALA).
Captain Theresa Williams (Ms)

Ms Theresa Williams was the only female in the Class of 99. She had come in as a candidate trainee marine pilot, commencing as the trainee tug master. She was a beacon and inspirational pathfinder who withstood some of the worst forms of discrimination, prejudice, and racism in the industry.

On this specific occasion, Ms Williams had been placed as an understudy with one of the experienced tug masters. She had reached a competency stage in her training when she could handle shipping under supervision. The norm would be that the mentor on the tugboat would independently determine when a trainee was ready to be allowed to do supervised jobs. In order to do so, the tug master would inform the marine pilot who would be in charge of the sailing ship that the job was being handled by the understudy, under supervision. Never before had the marine pilot had a say in the matter, except to be aware and endorse.

Likewise, when the ship was getting ready to sail, with the marine pilot on board, the tug master would alert the marine pilot that he had an understudy trainee who would be handling the sailing job, assuring him that the trainee had the necessary competency skills to do so under supervision. The marine pilot confirmed and gave the go ahead for the job to commence. However, on this occasion, on hearing a female voice over the radio, the marine pilot ‘lost it’ and yelled in protest: “No way. Never on my ship.”

You can imagine the embarrassment this caused the mentor, the mentee and the shock this sent throughout the trainee community. The tug master had to ask Ms Williams to step down. There were many such instances, but she and the rest of the transformation participants were determined, resilient and focused.

Captain Theresa Williams went on to become the first Black female tug master, the first female marine pilot in Africa, the first female marine operations manager and is now the Head/Dean of Maritime Studies at one of the country’s elite Universities. She has served the industry as an IMO consultant on ports and maritime and a mentor to many who are seeking to either join or grow in the maritime industry.

Making History: Sisters of the Sea – All-Female Sailing Events

To challenge and overcome the prejudice against women in the maritime industry, I initiated a historic event and organised a Women’s Day event in Durban. It would be a world-first, televised around the world to proclaim that women have the capacity and can acquire the competency to do any and all the jobs as competently as their male peers. The idea was to stage an All-Female Sailing Operation of a laden ship, involving the female only tug crews, marine pilots and berthing gangs.

We negotiated with the captain of a ship docked in Durban to let our all-female marine pilot and tug crews onto two tugboats and the berthing gangs handling the ropes to unberth and sail his fully laden container vessel bound for Singapore through the channel and out to sea.

Theresa Williams was the marine pilot in charge; at the time she was the only female marine pilot in all of the country and Africa’s ports; the supporting crew in berthing and on tugs, including the engineers were female. The guests were not told what they were experiencing until they saw Captain Williams lowered from the marine helicopter hoist, onto the quay, in front of the ecstatic crowd. The tugboat came to land alongside with its all-female crew, assisted by the rope handling berthing crew made up of females.

The shockwaves reverberated round the world and changed the course of history for maritime in the country and abroad.

The Class of 99 proved its mettle in this again in 2011 when it was in the forefront of making history and setting another record, a world-first, All-Female Voyage on the deep sea ship, SA AGULHAS, sailing from Cape Town, via Port Elizabeth, to Durban over three days. The entire deep-sea ship crew, the vessel traffic services crew, the tugboat crews and the berthing gangs,
were all South African females in the three ports. That was a moment of arrival for transformation and the coming of age of the Class of 99: inspiring female seafarers for generations to come.

The fast-tracked training programme was not only of benefit to South Africa. The rest of the world took note and expressed a great interest in emulating the South African benchmark, largely because they saw the tangible outcomes.

I salute the Class of 99 and the generation of female seafarers whom they inspired and continue to motivate; they are a group of extraordinary South Africans with vision, resilience, and tenacity in the face of adversity and opportunity.

This is their Eternal Story. Let the Legacy prevail! I salute them all.
Among the Class of 99 were leaders among our ports today:

Captain Rufus Lekala: Chief Harbour Master
Captain Vernal Jones: Port Manager: Port of Saldanha
Captain Dennis Mqadi: Executive Manager: SHEQ and Regulatory Compliance
Captain Naresh Sewnath: Senior Manager: Pilotage and VTS

The original group also included Sabelo Xulu, currently a pilot in Richards Bay, Devan Pulliah and Ashley Bergstedt, both of whom are pilots in the Port of Cape Town, as well as Eric Nkosi and Ephraim Kesa, who currently work in Marine Services, as well as one of TNPA’s first women in marine operations, Theresa Williams who today still works in the maritime industry. Also in the Class of 99 were Andrew Mataung and Joseph Mbatha, both pilots who have unfortunately passed away.

Following hot on their heels were:

Captain Sabelo Mdlalose: Harbour Master: Port of Durban
Captain Brynn Adamson: Harbour Master: Port of Port Elizabeth
Captain Thulani Dubeka: Harbour Master: Port of Ngqura
Captain Alex Miya: Harbour Master: Port of Cape Town
Captain Vania Cloete: Harbour Master: Port of Mossel Bay
Captain Gugu Dube: Harbour Master: Port of Richards Bay
Captain Kgadi Matlala: Harbour Master: Port of East London
Captain Silindile Mdlalose: Acting Harbour Master: Port of Saldanha

Captain Justin Adams: Acting Harbour Master: Port of Durban
Captain Pinky Zungu: Deputy Harbour Master: Port of Durban
Captain Nompumelelo Mkhize: Deputy Harbour Master: Port of Richards Bay
Captain Yael Wearley: Deputy Harbour Master: Port of Cape Town
Captain Quenton Brink: Former Harbour Master: Port of Saldanha

All were proud to be selected, eager to grow and willing to prove themselves over and over again under a previous generation of marine pilots and harbour masters that was somewhat sceptical about the changes. Little did they know at the time how determined TNPA was to drive the change and how they would rewrite the history book.
A key figure in TNPA’s maritime transformation journey has been and remains Chief Harbour Master, Captain Rufus Lekala, whose personal journey took him from being a taxi driver in Limpopo at the age of 24 in 1995, right through the ranks to become South Africa’s first Black Chief Harbour Master and the youngest in the world. From this position, he accelerated the pace of change.

“One of my biggest motivators was I didn’t want to go back to where I came from. People get dethroned by power and fame. I say rewind — reflect on where you have come from. Reflection helps me stay on course.”

Born in Limpopo, Captain Rufus Lekala’s parents were determined that their son should get the best high school education, and sent him to Pretoria at the age of 15 to live with his uncle until he matriculated in 1991.

Opportunities were scarce and Captain Lekala at first drove taxis to make a living — a great training ground for developing his people skills, but not his chosen career of a lifetime. He was searching for better opportunities when he saw a Portnet advert in the paper offering bursaries for cadetships for candidates, aged between 18 and 21 years, with matric maths and science.
“I was 24 years old, but I put my application in anyway and was called for
an interview in Cape Town. It went very well and Captain Jones told me I
wasn’t going home, but would be going to a navy camp from September to
December 1995.

“When our group finished the camp we were sent home again and told, ‘Don’t
call us. We’ll call you.’ So I went back to driving taxis until 19 January 1996
when I received a call from the Cape Peninsula Technikon, advising that I had
two days to register. I had a new-born at home and didn’t even have a bag to
pack my things in, but two days later I went straight from Cape Town station
to class, having been met by Portnet’s Human Resources Officer who drove
me to Tech.

“I worked hard in class and then did my sea-time, eventually receiving my
Officer’s ticket in 1999, after which I worked as a trainee tug master before
qualifying as a tug master six months later in September.”

That same month Captain Lekala was selected to be part of the first group
to undergo accelerated marine pilot training in Rotterdam. On his return
he chose to work in the Port of Saldanha as a trainee marine pilot, qualifying

Shortly thereafter he was relocated to the Port of East London where they
needed marine pilots, and within a few months was offered the position of
Harbour Master of the Port of East London, when Captain Benny Swemmer
took early retirement.

“I didn’t think I was ready, but was told there was no absolute science
that decided when a person was ready to become a Harbour Master,
and that is how I became the youngest Harbour Master at TNPA.”

His hard work was recognised when he won the Eagle Award in the annual
Transnet Chief Executive’s Awards in 2004. That same year he was appointed
as Harbour Master of the Port of Cape Town.
“It wasn’t easy to lead people who had been my superiors back when I had started working for TNPA, but maturity as well as the all-round experience I had gained in the smaller ports, helped me to manage the complexity of the role.”

Three years later Captain Lekala received a call from the then TNPA Chief Executive, Khomotso Phihlela, advising that he wanted him to relocate to take up the position of Harbour Master of South Africa’s biggest and busiest port, the Port of Durban.

His wife had just given birth and was reluctant to leave Cape Town so he went on his own accepting that TNPA had given him an opportunity of a lifetime, little knowing that he would soon be appointed South Africa’s first Black Chief Harbour Master and play an influential role in shaping TNPA’s maritime heritage.

Amongst his most significant achievements are driving the quest for gender equity in marine operations and creating in-house capacity to deliver TNPA’s helicopter service at the Ports of Richards Bay and Durban and in the future, at the Port of Cape Town.

He has also been at the helm during an exciting period when TNPA has replaced its dredging fleet, replaced and acquired new helicopters and acquired new tugs with 70 ton bollard pull, proudly manufactured in South Africa by South African ship builders.
“Being first is neither here nor there. What’s important is who follows, who you have brought along on the journey,” says Captain Rufus Lekala

Following his appointment as Chief Harbour Master, one of Captain Lekala’s goals was to ensure that TNPA’s radical transformation of marine personnel extended beyond race to gender.

He set himself a target of four female harbour masters amongst the total of eight, and of achieving strong representation of females in Deputy Harbour Master and senior operations roles. Today, three of TNPA’s harbour masters are female: Captain Gugu Precious Dube in the Port of Richards Bay, Captain Vania Cloete in the Port of Mossel Bay and Captain Kgadi Matlala in the Port of East London. In addition, 60 percent of TNPA’s deputy harbour masters and a number of senior operations managers are female.

“I always reflect back on where I came from and I didn’t want to go back there. I had been given an opportunity and believed it was up to me to give women opportunities in the previously male dominated maritime industry. I realised that it went beyond giving them an opportunity. They required full support to enable them to succeed in their roles,” Captain Lekala explains.

“The women we brought in and developed did not disappoint. Today we are leading the world in terms of the number of women in key positions in marine operations.”

According to recent statistics released by the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), women comprise only 1 – 2% of the 1.2 million global workforce of seafarers, with the majority of female seafarers (94%) working within the cruise industry.

We are proud that women hold 39.4% of the mission critical jobs in the South African port system. Their roles range from harbour masters, deputy harbour masters, to chief marine engineers and marine engineers, marine pilots, dredge masters, coxswains, tug masters, aviation technicians and helicopter pilots.

Of the eight commercial ports managed by TNPA, three have female port managers while seven have female harbour masters and/or deputy harbour masters bringing their unique characteristics and adding a woman’s touch to the job.

The introduction of female port managers, deputy harbour masters, senior operations managers and trainee pilots has significantly improved performance and productivity within the marine environment.

The Marine Cadet programme that commenced in 2009, currently has 69 female cadets out of a total of 164 trainees (42%).
GENDER TRANSFORMATION IN NUMBERS
39.4% of Mission Critical jobs within TNPA’s port system

42% of our Marine Cadet programme - 69 female cadets of a total of 164 trainees

50% of our Port Helicopter Pilots

26.6% of our Engineers – 40 females of a total of 150 engineers

50% of our Harbour Masters – 4 out of 8

75% of our Deputy Harbour Masters – 6 out of 8

50% of our Marine Operations Managers – 4 out of 8

31.3% of our Tug Masters – 26 out of 83

36.4% of our Marine Pilots – 32 out of 56

3 of our 8 commercial ports are headed by dynamic female Port Managers

Mpumi Dweba-Kwetana
Port Manager: Cape Town

Tandi Lebakeng
Port Manager: Ngqura

Sharon Sijako
Port Manager: East London

7 of our 8 commercial ports boast female Harbour Masters or Deputy Harbour Masters

Captain Pinky Zungu
Deputy Harbour Master: Nautical - Port of Durban

Captain Precious ‘Gugu’ Dube
Harbour Master - Port of Richards Bay

3 of our 8 commercial ports are headed by dynamic female Port Managers

Captain Nompumelelo Mkhize
Deputy Harbour Master - Port of Richards Bay

Captain Thokozani Mthethwa
Deputy Harbour Master – Port of Cape Town

Captain Vania Cloete
Harbour Master – Port of Mossel Bay

Captain Yolisa Tshangela
Deputy Harbour Master - Port of Saldanha

Captain Kgadi Matlala
Harbour Master – Port of East London

Captain Silindile Mdlalose
Acting Harbour Master – Port of Saldanha

Captain Yael Wearley
Deputy Harbour Master – Port of Cape Town

Captain Yolisa Tibane
Deputy Harbour Master – Port of Ngqura
TNPA’s first female Harbour Master was Captain Nontsindiso Tshazi appointed in April 2007, by the then CEO Khomotso Phihlela, to take over from Captain Dennis Mqadi in the Port of East London.

Having grown up in Umzimkhulu, Nontsindiso’s first sighting of ships at sea was when she moved to Umkomaas where she completed her matric. Her dream was to be a Chartered Accountant and she traded her Christmas dress for the application fee to study at the University of the Western Cape. She was accepted, but soon realised that she didn’t even have the bus fare to travel there from KwaZulu-Natal.

Nontsindiso then remembered an article in the newspaper looking for students interested in Maritime Studies and applied to Technikon Natal, borrowing R1000 from her uncle to cover the registration fee. “I was the only female in a class of 42 students, and the only one with no bursary. I applied to all the companies. I was told by one female recruitment officer, ‘We cannot give you the bursary because we know the sea is not a place for women, you will not make it there’. That pushed me harder to get the results. At the end of the year the person looking after the Transnet students gave me an opportunity to be part of the cadet programme, which enabled me to get practical training at sea on board ships.”

The day she was awarded her Certificate of Competency as a Navigating Officer by the South African Maritime Safety Authority (SAMSA), she knew that nothing would stand in her way, but overcoming the resistance of the old guard of tug masters took a lot of perseverance and self-belief. Part of the second group that went to Rotterdam for fast-tracked training, on her return Nontsindiso worked in the Port of Richards Bay as a trainee tug master.

“Nobody wanted to sign me off as a qualified tug master capable of handling the tug. I remember they would prepare two reports: one that I would see and sign to agree on my progress, not knowing that behind my back there was another report saying I would never qualify as a tug master, that academically I was good but lacked the practical coordination skills to handle the craft and that I would be very good as a Vessel Traffic Controller.

“I fought the battles and later was sent to the Port of Durban where I was placed under the supervision of Captain Derrick Pillay. After a couple of assessments under his wing, I remember him asking me what was I doing there, because I was competent to handle the craft.”

Nontsindiso received her tug master’s licence and went on to qualify as a marine pilot in the Port of Richards Cape. “I was thrilled. I looked back to where I came from and had tears in my eyes.”

She would later be appointed as Harbour Master in the Port of East London. One person she could always turn to was Captain Rufus Lekala, who was her mentor.

“Being a Black woman in leadership in those days presented its challenges. I remember we had a fatal incident in the port and we gathered together for the investigation with SAMSA. I invited my Marine Technical Manager, an old White male with me to the meeting. The Captain started greeting and shaking hands with everyone except me. I guess he thought I was there to take notes. He handed out his business cards and he left me out again and gave one to my Technical Manager. A couple of days later he came to the Port Control building for a permit he needed before sailing. He asked to see the Harbour Master and was directed to my office. I could see the shock written all over him.”

Nontsindiso later became Head of the Maritime Rescue Co-ordination Centre for SAMSA before leaving the organisation to start her own business as an independent financial advisor.

Today, there are so many opportunities in the maritime space that are not gender based. We broke through the barrier a long time ago and there is now a strong support base of female mariners.
Another aspect that caught the attention of the Chief Harbour Master was that while TNPA owned its own helicopters, the service was outsourced to a company that had not a single person of colour amongst the Pilots and Maintenance Engineers delivering the service. The contractors did not take the issue of transformation seriously.

Captain Lekala began work on a strategy that would migrate the service in-house, which was well supported by the Transnet board. The first step was to hire an aviation expert, Agrippa Mpofu, who joined TNPA from the Civil Aviation Authority and together they prepared a position paper that would deliver a full complement of Helicopter Pilots and Avionics Engineers to meet TNPA’s needs within five years.

The contract was structured in such a way that each year the percentage of outsourced Pilots and Aircraft Maintenance Engineers would diminish, while the percentage of TNPA’s own pilots and engineers would increase commensurately until all positions were taken up by qualified TNPA personnel.

The proposal was approved in July 2012 and the first training began in 2014. “By 2019 all 20 pilots had obtained their commercial pilot’s licence and the first six of 14 engineers in training had qualified with their aircraft maintenance engineering licence, with the remaining eight set to qualify in the next two years. This gave us the full complement to run our own operation in-house.

“We had a strike rate of 100%. All of our trainees came from previously disadvantaged backgrounds and all of them have passed their various certifications along the way – a great source of pride and another significant milestone on our transformation journey,” Lekhala said.

Building TNPA’s aviation service from the ground up

As a youngster, Agrippa Mpofu, Senior Operations Manager was fascinated by aeroplanes and curious to understand how huge machines carrying heavy loads could take off into the sky. This spurred him on to become an Aircraft Maintenance Engineer at Oliver Tambo Airport, where he worked for South African Airlink and South African Express.

Agrippa has never stopped learning. He completed a Management Advancement Programme (MAP) at Wits Business School and holds a Master of Business Administration (MBA). Later he joined the Civil Aviation Authority where he gained in depth knowledge about the regulatory environment and what was required to run an aviation service. His background made him the perfect candidate to build TNPA’s aviation service from the ground up, opening up opportunities for talented youngsters from previously disadvantaged backgrounds, who had never dreamed of flying a helicopter, to join TNPA’s ranks as professional pilots and aircraft engineers.

Agrippa’s proudest moments have been seeing the trainees selected for these two career paths in aviation meet their certification requirements, some with flying colours.

The programme has been a game changer not just enabling TNPA to deliver this service in-house, but changing the lives of a new generation of skilled professionals, who are passionate and committed about being the best they can be.

Agrippa speaks passionately about the service, pioneered by TNPA way back in 1995. “It is unique and challenging because of the risks involved in lowering a human being from a helicopter safely onto a vessel, often at night, in different weather conditions.”

The brainchild of a previous Harbour Master, Captain Neil Brink at the Port of Richards Bay, it has become the norm at both Durban and Richards Bay where it has been so successful that TNPA is planning to introduce the helicopter service at the Port of Cape Town from 2021.
TRAINING IN MARINE OPERATIONS

During the last five years the face of training has changed radically at the Maritime School of Excellence with the use of simulators for the training of dredging personnel and marine pilots. This provides the experience of simulating all kinds of weather and environmental conditions without the risk.

Trainee pilots get to practise their skills including how to handle emergencies in a safe environment, where there is no risk. It gives them the feel of a real ship so that by the time they get on board a vessel, they know what they are in for and what to do.

MARITIME CULTURE AT TNPA

The maritime culture at TNPA is one of collaboration. In a dynamic environment, every day is different and you can’t learn it all from a textbook.

TNPA rotates its harbour masters to gain experience of conditions at different ports. Various platforms ensure that information is shared, such as TNPA’s Harbour Masters Forum, which meets monthly.

TNPA is also represented on the International Harbour Masters Association, where Captain Naresh Sewnath is Vice President. This role offers TNPA a channel to call on international colleagues for advice. Most of TNPA’s harbour masters have completed an International Harbour Master Diploma through the Association.

TNPA also provides input into, and keeps abreast of, international legislation through its membership of the International Maritime Organisation so that it can make informed decisions and prepare for changes, such as the new legislation imposing a 0.5% limit on sulphur emissions.

INTEGRATED PORT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

TNPA has embraced technology to meet the demands of an increasingly competitive international market, where customers demand efficiency, transparency and partnership.

The period 2013 to 2015 saw the development of TNPA’s Integrated Port Management System (IPMS). The objectives were to provide a single window operating system on the web with automated inputs and near real time information on shipping and operations, while eliminating paperwork. TNPA customised and developed a system to suit port users and employees which has evolved to include online notifications and service bookings.

Joint Operations Centres have since been set-up across the port system that use IPMS.
TRANSFORMING AND INTEGRATING OUR COMMUNITIES

Ports have also developed much closer relationships with their communities through various initiatives. These include:

• Port Festivals were once regular events attracting thousands of visitors until the advent of the International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) Code in 2004. The stringent implementation of this code meant that for more than 10 years the public had been excluded from the port. TNPA re-established festivals in 2016 by opening the South African ports to members of the public to showcase the career and business opportunities they offer.

• Career Exhibitions to create awareness of maritime careers and the subject requirements at high school level, in order to qualify for tertiary studies in preparation for maritime careers.

• CSI funding of Maths and Science tuition, classroom facilities and educational support in our adopted schools in the surrounding communities.

• Funding of tuition and boarding of four new learners annually at Lawhill Maritime Centre in Simonstown since 2006.

• Partnership with the National Department of Transport towards the annual World Maritime Day activities.

• Support of the Take a Girl Child to Work Day and Tomorrow’s Man initiatives.

All of these are geared towards creating a pipeline of mission critical skills.

FACING THE CHALLENGES

As we move forward, we are continually adapting to change. Among the challenges we are preparing for are global regulatory compliance challenges including the 0.5% sulphur cap on emissions which will be introduced into law by the International Maritime Organisation in 2020.

In recent years we have begun to experience the impact of climate change with major storms disrupting port operations. Rather than resisting the changing climate, TNPA is focusing on developing resilience to minimise the extent and duration of lost cargo throughput resulting from climate-induced disruptions in our ports. The goal is to bring the port’s freight movement system back to its prior operating level before costly and protracted delays occur.

A National Climate Cluster has been established in addition to Climate Clusters at each port for the sharing of lessons learned from disruptive weather events, helping ports prepare for such eventualities by reviewing their emergency preparations and recovery plans.

As TNPA, we face competition for international business from ports in neighbouring countries – Namibia and Mozambique. We need to re-engineer business processes and design thinking to focus on economic growth using unconventional methods in order to diversify our revenue streams.

The future will see us continue to operate as a vehicle of the state, facilitating trade and unlocking economic growth – through reducing the cost of doing business and delivering a globally competitive transport and logistics system.
FROM CURIOUS SCHOLAR TO SA’S YOUNGEST MARINE PILOT TO PORT MANAGER

CAPTAIN VERNAL JONES
PORT MANAGER: PORT OF SALDANHA

“If I were to go back 21 years, I don’t think I did realise the impact that it could create. I don’t think I realised at the time how big it actually was.”

CAPTAIN JONES always had an interest in understanding ships – but it was a work experience programme during his matric year that truly set the ball rolling for a career in maritime that would break new ground in traversing the divide between operations and the office space.

“In 1993 I was introduced to port control, getting an understanding of the industry and seeing if this would spark some interest. It was there that I met the Deputy Port Captain at the time – Captain Eddie Bremner, who would become a harbour master in various ports and eventually Chief Harbour Master in his own distinguished career. He was instrumental in me understanding the maritime side,” he said.

It was during conversation with Captain Bremner that Captain Jones got a real feeling for the opportunities that a career in maritime could present from someone who could impart lessons from their own experiences of life at sea.

He enrolled at the Cape Technikon (now Cape Peninsula University of Technology) on a bursary from Portnet and began his cadetship in 1995. This year will mark his 25th year of service within Transnet.

Following his time at sea, Captain Jones began his rise in the ranks at Transnet. First came the role of tug master in the Port of Port Elizabeth – before being one of the 12 selected for the marine pilotage programme in Rotterdam.

Captain Jones was the youngest pilot in the country at the time, taking up duty in the Port of Richards Bay before being promoted to the role of Marine Operations Manager at the Port of Mossel Bay in 2007, where he continued to pilot vessels while juggling the other responsibilities of the role.

He returned to Richards Bay, first as a Deputy Harbour Master – then promoted to Harbour Master and later transferred as Harbour Master at the Port of Cape Town; before continuing his journey towards the commercial side of the business and taking up his current post as Port Manager at the Port of Saldanha.

“It closed the loop completely. I was the first and am the only appointed Port Manager that has come from a harbour master background. But to me, most of the marine operations activities and what the port does from a commercial side, revolve around ships and cargo – and that’s where I was trained”.

“The Port Manager role involves harnessing the business aspect, bringing in my maritime experience having sailed at sea, and understanding the Transnet business with terminal operations and marine operations,” he said.

The journey was not easy, and it involved changing perceptions – but the hard work of the Class of ’99 helped pave the way for those who followed.

“In the maritime business there is a story to tell. We can see how we’ve transformed it in terms of gender by how many female harbour masters, deputy harbour masters, pilots, tug masters and marine operations managers we have. We played a role in that journey,” he said.

Looking forward, Captain Jones knows that it’s through sharing successes and experience with others that growth and development can be found. He’s broken it down into a simple formula that he has taken with him in each of his roles.

“My goal is always to change and develop one person. If I can help change someone’s life, they can do the same for others – and that can have a multiplying effect,” he said.
A NEVER-ENDING JOURNEY OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

CAPTAIN DENNIS MQADI
EXECUTIVE MANAGER: SHEQ AND REGULATORY COMPLIANCE

“I couldn’t even swim when I joined the navy. The navy taught me you can float in salt water. It taught me discipline, respect and how to survive tough times.”

For Captain Mqadi, joining the navy after he matriculated was a route out of poverty and the start of a lifetime of continuous improvement. He trained as a Junior Officer in Saldanha from February 1991 and began building his maritime career.

“The navy had just begun its transformation and I was able to move through the ranks and to qualify as a Navigation Officer by 1996. I was also lucky enough to go overseas on an exchange programme for eight months.”

“In 1997 a number of my colleagues jumped ship to join what was then Portnet and I decided I wanted to learn more about the commercial maritime industry. I trained as a tug master in East London, qualifying in 1998 and was grateful to be among the Class of 99 that undertook the marine pilot training in Rotterdam.”

On his return Captain Mqadi was stationed in the Port of Durban where he obtained his first licence in October 2000. By this time the ports authority was looking to introduce harbour masters of colour and he was among the first to be developed for the role. At this stage he was still working as a marine pilot in the Port of Durban, undergoing a management development programme at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and performing the role of Acting Harbour Master – shuttling between the harbour, the classroom and the boardroom.

On his promotion to Harbour Master of the Port of East London, he took over the wheel from Captain Lekala, but continued to play a dual role of managing marine operations and piloting. He left East London in 2007 to become Harbour Master of the Port of Richards Bay for three years before taking up the position in the Port of Cape Town for 14 months, and then on to South Africa’s busiest port – the Port of Durban. With each move came the responsibility for more people, more vessels, more cargo and greater financial value and risk.

From a management point of view, moving from port to port taught him the importance of being consistent, yet adaptable to changing environments, willing to learn and understand the dynamics of the management and operational teams.
Every time he vacated a position it opened up a space for another leader making their way through the ranks.

By this stage TNPA’s continuous improvement journey was well underway, exposing the need to introduce new functions to take the business forward. With his combined naval and port experience in a variety of roles, Captain Mqadi was ideally placed to head up Safety, Health, Environment, Quality and Regulatory Oversight.

His exposure to so many aspects of marine operations and management grew his ability to make sound decisions and to trust his first response. “When you are a pilot in an emergency situation, time is not on your side and you have to apply your mind and act decisively.

“My experience has also taught me the importance of compliance. It takes discipline and consistency to create an environment of stability that supports smooth, safe operations. If it’s not safe, don’t do it!”
Captain Naresh Sewnath grew up in Durban as part of a large family including six brothers and a sister. Their father passed away when four of the brothers were still at school. Having experienced hard times made him determined to achieve success and make his mother proud.

Portnet’s bursary scheme for cadets was his entry ticket to a promising maritime career. He qualified in 1993 as a Deck Officer and sailed as the 3rd Officer for Safmarine and Unicorn.

“I felt great pride standing on the bridge, taking responsibility for the navigation of ships carrying huge volumes of cargo.

“At the time, TNPA had a shortage of tug masters so I joined the Port of Durban where I worked under various tug masters to learn the role. I worked as a tug master for four years and undertook critical jobs such as towing, salvage and dry docking – which included managing crew, budgeting and lay-up plans for the tugs.”

The accelerated marine pilot training programme in Rotterdam was a great opportunity for Captain Sewnath and other tug masters to progress to the next level.

“The training programme included three months in Rotterdam where we learnt to pilot vessels using a simulator. They also had a small ship that we used to learn about ship handling, before we returned to South Africa to get practical experience.

“When we met with resistance from the older generation of marine pilots and harbour masters, we persevered, never letting anything deter us from achieving our goals.’

“As previously disadvantaged individuals, we were proud to be selected. We made it work for ourselves, the organisation, and those that followed in our footsteps, little knowing how far we would go in changing the course of South Africa’s maritime history.’
For Captain Sewnath, one of his unforgettable experiences took place on 10 October 2017, as Senior Harbour Master at the Port of Durban. He formed part of the team with the Harbour Master Captain Alex Miya that went to the assistance of five ships that broke their moorings during a severe storm with winds gusting at over 80 knots.

"With the support of the team, including SAMSA, we prioritised what needed to be done, waited for the tide to assist us and then attended to a huge container vessel that had run aground in the entrance channel using five tugs to manoeuvre her back to safety. We calmly went about our business till all five vessels were safely moored."

The teamwork displayed is a typical example of the culture of collaboration that has come to characterise marine operations, under a transformed leadership, in a democratic South Africa.
As the daughter of a dedicated Spoornet employee, Joseph Williams, Theresa's early memories included the tugboat rides during Portnet family days, which sparked her interest in a life at sea.

She began her own studies as a Portnet bursary student straight out of matric back in 1992. After completing two years full-time at CPUT, Theresa joined Unicorn Shipping Lines for her sea-time as a cadet/trainee officer, where she served aboard different vessels before qualifying as a Ship Navigation Officer in 1998.

“I was on board a container vessel, as a Navigation Officer with Safmarine, when I was recalled by Portnet to join the pilot training scheme. Portnet’s Transformation executives under the leadership of Captain Rick van der Krol and Commander Tsietsi Mokhele were committed to having at least one female join the accelerated training programme,” Theresa explains.

“During the four months in Rotterdam, one of the busiest ports in Europe, I learnt a lot from the Dutch pilots who also had one female pilot at the time.” Theresa went on to qualify as a marine pilot in 2001, under the mentorship of pilot Donald McGhee, the designated mentor for the pilot trainees on the Rotterdam scheme. Theresa always had a passion for teaching, based on community service, and has been involved in the mentorship and training of trainee tug masters and pilots as well as in the selection and recruitment of Transnet cadets.

During her 11 years with Transnet where she ultimately served as a Marine Operations Manager, she also completed an MBA with the UNISA School of Business Leadership before leaving to gain private sector working experience. This included a two-year stint on a European Union sponsored project to deliver training programmes in Western and Central African countries, as well as serving as a Ship Navigation Officer with various companies in order to obtain the necessary sea-time towards higher sea-going licences. In between she lectured in Maritime Studies at CPUT.

Theresa was awarded a Chief Ship Navigation licence by SAMSA in 2018. That same year, she became Head of the Maritime Studies Department at CPUT, breaking ground as the first female in this role, following the retirement of one of her mentors, Captain Professor Edward Snyders. Among the changes Theresa has witnessed is the increasing number of females who are joining the maritime industry. “Ports are responding to the 4th industrial revolution by embracing technology which has made it physically easier for females to thrive in the maritime space,” she explains.

“Maritime education is also investing increasingly in digital technology-based offerings, such as the use of simulation to train personnel. There are exciting opportunities for research and innovation within maritime higher education especially. The industry is much broader than just seafaring. Relevant areas for research and innovation include water as a scarce resource, solar energy, energy efficiency, turbines for generating power and marine environmental matters related to global warming,” Theresa says.

Her advice to young people is: “Research the industry. Find mentors and focus on a career path and not a short-term stint. It’s important to study towards higher qualifications in order to stay relevant, competitive and to be able to contribute. Gain broad knowledge and don’t fear to try or fail. Consider stumbling blocks as bumps in the road at which to stop, reflect and change course as necessary. Never stay down, get up and keep on moving. Have faith for YOUR path and don’t be a copy.”
For some, that pivotal trip to Rotterdam would ignite a passion for piloting that would never fade. Marine Pilots Devan Pulliah, Sabelo Xulu and Ashley Bergstedt can all attest to the pull of the ocean’s currents.

Others, like Eric Nkosi and Ephraim Kesa, would apply their expertise in other ways, undertaking roles in a support structure built on excellence in training, discipline and strength of character.

These members of the Class of 99 strengthen the backbone of South Africa’s maritime industry. They set a precedent and are helping to guide new generations of mariners in a transformed industry. These are their stories.
As a navy veteran with seven years experience, mainly on strike craft, Devan joined Transnet in 1997 to become a tug master in East London before being enrolled in the Class of 99 to help change the future of the maritime industry.

He qualified as a marine pilot and in 2003 was deployed to the Port of Durban – where he learned all about controlling fear, regaining calm, and managing incredible pressure.

“There were only about 14 of us when 22 were needed. I have never worked so hard in my life. It was also the first time that I was being transferred onto vessels by helicopter. My heart would be pounding as I was lowered onto the vessel, which would often be rolling beneath me. It was before the entrance channel was widened and you had to go at an angle at full speed to get the vessel through the current. Some days you barely got back on dry land before you were back in the helicopter going out to sea to bring another vessel in,” he said.

Those early years were difficult, and mentors such as Tsietsi Mokhele, Gerry Staverees and Don McGhee helped protect the young pilots as they gained experience in the South African port system.

“Tsietsi Mokhele came up with the fast-tracked piloting concept. I got to know and respect him in the Navy. Gerry and Don fended off all the guys that made life difficult for us. They were also so willing to share their knowledge. We had to fight our way through the ports,” he said.

As a senior pilot, Devan continues to play a vital role in supporting the South African Maritime Economy – as a relief pilot to the Ports of Port Elizabeth, Ngqura and Mossel Bay and is also understudying to relieve at Saldanha, in addition to his responsibilities in the Port of Cape Town.

There are not many like him in the port system, as you have to understand the port and the different weather conditions in order to bring a vessel safely into port. Devan’s thirst for excitement means he is always up for the challenge.

As for gender equity, Devan believes that there is no room to hide in this industry.

“Over the years I have seen and trained the ladies on the water, and they are as good if not better than the men. You can’t fake it in this job, and women have pushed the boundaries. In management roles they are more subtle, and intuitive, which is definitely a positive,” he said.
PROVING I COULD DO THE JOB

MARINE PILOT SABELO XULU
PORT OF RICHARDS BAY

“The most important thing is to get the basics right and develop your own style of piloting.”

Being part of the first group to undergo the new pilot training programme in Rotterdam in 1999 was a big motivator for the young Sabelo Xulu from Melmoth in KwaZulu-Natal.

Sabelo went directly into maritime studies from matric. He had completed his cadetship earlier that year and was serving as an officer at sea when he was approached by Transnet and selected for the training.

On his return from Rotterdam, he undertook his practical training in the Port of Richards Bay from 2000. Working hard to prove himself he obtained his first pilot’s licence in July 2001 and continued through six licence stages to achieve his open licence in January 2006.

“My biggest challenge was that I was among the youngest to become a pilot at the age of 24 and most ships’ captains could not believe that I could do the job. However, I was able to prove them wrong by making sure that my jobs were done perfectly.”

“I am grateful to a number of senior pilots who contributed a lot towards my training: Pilot Wim Van Es (designated pilot trainer), Pilot Graeme Barret, Pilot Mike Van Loon and Pilot Keith Marks. They took their time to teach me different skills in piloting and I am not afraid to say that I am a successful pilot because of them.”

Sabelo may have had some near-misses, but believes those experiences made him a better and more cautious pilot. “I have never had an incident where a ship was damaged due to my piloting, but I once had a life-threatening situation with a pilot boat some years ago. I fell into the sea while boarding an incoming vessel at about 02:00 in the morning. The incident taught me that life comes first and that at no stage should I risk my life.”

“The changes in the maritime industry have created many opportunities for younger employees as tug masters, pilot boat masters, berthing masters, marine managers, deputy harbour masters and harbour masters.”

“My advice to young cadets who want to become pilots is that they should not be afraid. This job can be done. To be successful you need a positive attitude, courage and discipline.”
The Class of 99 that trained in Rotterdam was effectively changing the way an entire industry would think about marine pilotage. What was once a 14-year career trajectory was fast-tracked to service a global industry in desperate need of transformation and working resources.

For Ashley Bergstedt, the weight of that transformation became apparent when suddenly he was tasked with bringing vessels into port on his own.

“I was lucky to have a piloting mentor in Gerry Staverees who showed genuine interest in me. He made me a better, more thoughtful pilot,” he said.

Ashley had begun his maritime career with Safmarine, been to sea and completed his navigation officer qualification, when he applied for a job as a trainee marine pilot. That move would see him joining the Class of 99, and helping to transform the South African maritime landscape.

He has has witnessed strides taken at Transnet to shift towards gender equity first-hand.

“There weren’t even ablution facilities for females when I started here. It’s a lot nicer now. Women bring a softer touch and have helped move us away from the rigidity of a male dominated environment. It’s a hugely positive change,” he said.

With two decades of experience under his belt, he sees himself as a pilot mentor, and acknowledges his responsibility in passing down his experience to a new generation of marine pilots.

Looking back – it was an easy fit for Ashley, who lives for the fresh air, the exercise and the responsibility that comes with the role.

To anyone interested in joining this industry, his advice is: “You need to be able to work alone, enjoy your own company, must have ethics and self-control. You need to have a moral compass and be analytical about what you do. A fair amount of common sense doesn’t hurt either.”
Ephraim Kesa was no stranger to the cold waters of life out at sea when he joined Transnet in 1999. In exile during our country’s darkest days, he had been introduced to the maritime industry – servicing vessels in the Caspian Sea in the capital of Azerbaijan, Baku.

It was not an easy life, but neither was his return to South Africa. After being stationed in Tanzania for a year, he finally returned home as repatriation efforts began in 1992. He spent two years without a job, as the Apartheid regime crumbled.

The election of Nelson Mandela, and the first real efforts of transformation brought Ephraim to the Navy. “It was a difficult time, but I managed to get a lot of my qualifications during my time with the Navy,” he said.

“Then in 1999, I saw an advert in the City Press. I decided that I had all that it takes to join Transnet and become a pilot.”

As part of the class of 99, Ephraim travelled to Rotterdam for intensive training.

Remnants of South Africa’s past lingered still, as integrating the next generation of South African pilots into Transnet’s workforce proved a difficult task.

“It’s like they thought we were untrainable. We just had to push through,” Ephraim said.

Due to personal circumstances Ephraim chose to focus his efforts on excelling as a tug master, where he worked in the Port of Cape Town and the Port of Durban.

Now a shift manager in the Port of Durban, he supports a new generation of proudly South African tug masters, engineers and deckhands.

The future is bright, and Ephraim can see the role that he and his fellow colleagues played in transforming the port system.

“The new generation is lucky. People accept each other now, and we are aligned with the development of South Africa,” Ephraim said.

And to young employees, his advice is this:

“Take this opportunity with both hands and look forward for what you want to achieve. Career-wise you must push hard to qualify and keep on learning. You never stop learning. You must have courage, and you must love what you’re doing. Coming to work shouldn’t be a struggle. You must know that you’re coming in to do what you love.”
For Eric Nkosi, the real success story lies in capacity creation – and the next generation of men and women who will take us further in the maritime industry.

His maritime journey started in 1996 when he was recruited as a trainee cadet by Transnet after finishing matric.

Following three years at sea and with a Class 3 Deck Officer qualification under his belt, he joined the class of 1999 for training in Rotterdam.

He returned to the port system and serviced vessels as a marine pilot until 2009. Those early days were particularly difficult.

“When we came back from our training in Rotterdam, there were a lot of challenges. We joined a White dominated industry and we were young, so when we went onboard ships – the masters would interrogate us about our ages, qualifications – and judge us based on our appearance before we even had a chance to present ourselves and show what we could offer. That was the main challenge at the time,” he said.

It was when he switched roles in 2009, that South Africa’s maritime transformation really began to click for Eric. He’s all about building capacity, and his current role focuses on the training of future pilots, tug masters, engineers and GPRs across South Africa’s port system.

“We were not sure whether we were going to make it or not, but the young people coming through in the industry now have us to look up to – and they’re confident in their abilities. They know that they can make it,” he said.

“With a young, capable, and independent crop of mariners honing their skills under the guidance of South African trailblazers the future looks bright.”
Having grown up and matriculated in Eshowe, Alex Miya, joined South African Railways & Harbours as a Shorehand helping to moor vessels in the Port of Richards Bay, 65 kilometres away during the Apartheid era of the eighties.

“People used to laugh at me because I used to tell my colleagues that one day I would drive those big ships coming in and out of the harbour. At the time I didn’t even know where to start, but I kept saying it,” recounts Captain Miya.

Somebody must have overheard him and he was sent by the Port Captain to Richards Bay Technical College to study for certificates in electrical and mechanical engineering. From there he went to Technikon Natal to do maritime studies, before going to sea as a cadet with Safmarine. He then passed his oral exams, which made him eligible for selection for the pilot training in Rotterdam.

“I understood the role we played in the ports as gateways to trade. This inspired me to study further so I could make a bigger contribution, and I went on to obtain my open licence,” he said.

Captain Miya then became Marine Operations Manager in the Port of Mossel Bay, Deputy Harbour Master of the Port of Saldanha, Harbour Master of the Port of Saldanha, Harbour Master of the Port of Durban from 2014 to 2018 and then Harbour Master of the Port of Cape Town where he is currently posted.

Asked about how marine piloting prepared him for the role of Harbour Master, Captain Miya said: “Training as a marine pilot taught me the rules of the game and the vulnerability of this profession where you are the authority, and have to make and stand by your decisions regarding the safe and efficient passage of vessels through the port. The risks associated with being a harbour master revolve around a knowledge of piloting, as you lead and guide the pilots.”

“You make decisions that can be challenged in a court of law so you have to think logically, use your expertise and consult with others to ensure your decisions are well informed.”
“Doing things better calls on you to be a leader who can persuade people out of their comfort zones into uncharted waters.”

“When I was working at the Port of Saldanha, the three shift system was causing lost time due to extra shift changes and people were working a lot of overtime resulting in fatigue and incidents. Despite meeting resistance, I introduced a four shift system where pilots worked a 12 hour shift to reduce the number of shift changes to two, to improve efficiency.”

“Off-duty hours were increased to 36 hours and we found with the extra rest there was a reduction in incidents. While unpopular at first, the decision proved to be the right one!”

One of Captain Miya’s stand-out moments was when a driver who had transported Shorehands back in the eighties, and was now transporting marine pilots to and from port control, said: “Look at you now” and reminded him of what he used to say when he was a Shorehand about driving those ships.

“I had no idea I would come so far. Sometimes what you say and repeat comes true. My personal journey tells me that you have it within yourself. You are the Captain of your own destination.”
Born of a maritime family, as the son of a skipper on a fishing boat in Port Elizabeth, Captain Adamson was always interested in everything to do with the sea. As a youngster he was a lifeguard and a naval cadet, and planned to join the navy, possibly as a diver, when he left school.

"By the time I matriculated, my dad had passed on and my mom was keen for me to follow in his footsteps. I had no clue about the commercial side of the industry, but Portnet was offering bursaries to previously disadvantaged individuals who had the right credentials. Captain Jones, who was a year ahead of me, created the interest and I went to find out more and ended up being accepted to do a bridging course at Wingfield Technical College at the naval base in Cape Town with a group of about twenty including Captain Lekala.

"I realised I could make a success of this and began applying myself and having passed the bridging course, was given a bursary to do maritime studies at the Cape Peninsula Technikon.

"As a group, we grew up together, struggled together, studied and travelled together, then went off to sea as Cadets, which shaped us into the people we are today. We were exposed to officers of different nationalities who put us through our paces and we passed the test, which prepared us for the tough times ahead.

"A huge milestone for all of us was getting our Class 3 Certificates of Competency – our tickets to success! What we didn't know at the time was just how far we would go in achieving the transformation of the industry," he said.

Captain Adamson took every opportunity to advance his career, including the marine pilot training bridging course in Rotterdam along with his peers.

"When we came back to get our practical experience, we worked under an older generation of marine pilots, who considered that we had a 'lesser' qualification. It was tough. We had to fight for opportunities and prove ourselves over and over again.

"I loved the job with all its challenges and went on to get my open licence. There is no better job in the world than being a marine pilot. Everyday is different. You have to work with different vessel power, different wind speed and direction, deep ships, light ships, with tugs and without tugs. You learn more as you go and improve with experience," he concluded.

"We didn't know how far we would go in achieving the transformation of the industry. We were the instruments to make it happen."
benchmarking yourself against your peers, and enjoying the satisfaction of knowing you are making progress. “Transnet gave us phenomenal support and we were able to move up through the ranks to take up positions as pilots, deputy harbour masters and harbour masters.

For Captain Adamson there has been no stopping on the learning journey as he is currently on the Transnet Talent Nurturing programme. He says this breed of harbour masters is ready and looking forward to tackling the challenge of balancing regulatory and economic pressures in commercial shipping, and finding ways of adapting to environmental pressures such as climate change.

His advice to youngsters is:

‘Be ready to meet the opportunities and embrace them. Don’t hold back. Show interest. Pick people’s brains. Learn from the people around you and take responsibility for your career.’
Captain Thulani Dubeko's road to Harbour Master has been a long, hard trek, paved with the resolve to succeed for both himself and others like him.

“I come from a very, very poor background and I feel that I am on this earth for a reason. One of the biggest things for me is to make a mark and change other people’s lives.”

Never content with remaining stagnant, the Port of Ngqura’s Harbour Master has squeezed every drop of potential out of each opportunity that has come his way.

Hailing from Lusikisiki, Dubeko was one of the second group of candidates to participate in the marine pilot training programme in Rotterdam. His own maritime journey began 22 years ago when he joined Safmarine as a trainee navigation officer. In 2000 he found a home at the Port of Port Elizabeth as a trainee tug master and after training in Rotterdam, his career truly began to gain traction.

“I came back at the end of 2000, motivated to carry on training. In 2001, I qualified to become a tug master and by 2003, I was a marine pilot.”

Four years later, Captain Dubeko obtained both his open licence and a promotion to serve as a Marine Operations Manager at the Port of East London.

In 2010, he moved to Nelson Mandela Bay to join TNPA’s youngest port – the Port of Ngqura – to take on the role of Deputy Harbour Master.

Now, with seven years’ experience as Harbour Master and 20 years as part of the TNPA family, Captain Dubeko remains as excited for the future as he was in 1997 when he first stepped into the industry.

The biggest change he has witnessed during his time in TNPA, is the change in complexity, including innovations such as the Integrated Port Management System. He has seen many previously disadvantaged people come in and learn the necessary skills to operate new equipment, new craft and learn new processes and systems.

“We’ve also had new – especially Black-owned businesses – coming in and it is exciting because it means that everyone is able to participate in the industry. Our younger South Africans these days can be officers all over the world. They can change a lot of lives.”

“I believe there are still challenges but we are definitely on the right track to deal with them one day at a time.”
Growing up in rural KwaNongoma, Captain Mdlalose had never set his eyes on the sea. When he matriculated he wanted to be a doctor and though he was accepted at MEDUNSA, his family couldn’t afford the fees. He was working at the local dry cleaners when one of his school teachers called to tell him she had seen bursaries advertised for Maritime Studies.

“I applied, but I didn’t get a bursary. My father sponsored the registration fee and I took out a study loan, but never managed to finish my Maritime Studies as I had a health challenge. I then worked in construction for a year and in 1998 was fortunate to be employed by Portnet, who sent me back to Tech to finish my studies. I then did my sea-time, passed my orals and worked in the Port of Richards Bay as a tug master. I was still keen to keep learning, so I started a management course before going on the accelerated marine pilot training in Rotterdam.

Later he was among the first group to study for the International Harbour Masters Diploma. “When I look back, as much as I enjoy being a Harbour Master, my best job was being a marine pilot for five years where I had the time of my life. I loved the challenge. Even if you are bringing in the same vessel, the harbour conditions, the weather, the crew, the cargo and the vessel’s performance will be different.

“You have to think on your feet, stay calm, respond appropriately, enrol people to help you and communicate well with the tug masters you rely on to help guide the vessel safely into port.”

Captain Mdlalose believes he is blessed to be where he is today and ascribes his career success to embracing every opportunity that came his way, appreciating the people around him and pushing himself to give of his best.

Not surprisingly, he is an inspiration and role model for people in his community, from the petrol attendant at the local garage, who has seen him acquire more gold stripes on his uniform, to his peers – including a recently qualified engineer, who reminded Captain Mdlalose that he had told him to take Maths and Science at school and says: “I am where I am because of you.”
CAPTAIN GUGU DUBE
HARBOUR MASTER:
PORT OF RICHARDS BAY

Gugu Precious Dube was recruited by Captain Lekala to take the helm in the Port of Richards Bay. Captain Dube had previously made history as one of the first three females in Africa to obtain their open licences as marine pilots.

Captain Dube cut her teeth in marine operations when she studied Maritime studies at DUT and went to sea at a time when this was strictly male territory. “The men on board treated me like I was invading their space. I could not ask for special treatment and they were not willing to show me the ropes. I had to be independent and learn the hard way.”

Captain Dube worked her way up the ranks, became a tug master and then underwent the accelerated training programme in Durban.

She then went to Rotterdam for practical training, before doing her on the job training to qualify as a marine pilot and obtain her open licence, enabling her to pilot vessels of any size.

“That was a major highlight. There is nothing as exciting as being behind the wheel of a huge vessel. You feel ecstatic as you experience the adrenalin rush. It’s addictive because all ships are different and you want to test your skill and keep improving,” she said.

“Today I look on with pride as I see how I helped pave the way for other women in marine operations and how well they are doing.”

“Things have changed drastically because there are more of us these days and gender equity has become the norm in marine operations. Sometimes the whole shift on duty will be female!”

“Things have changed drastically because there are more of us these days and gender equity has become the norm in marine operations. Sometimes the whole shift on duty will be female!”
Once Captain Vania Cloete had made up her mind to be a mariner, nothing would stop her from achieving her dream. Introduced to the maritime industry through a friend of her father, she enrolled for Maritime Studies at CPUT, did her cadetship at sea with Safmarine, obtained her STCW Class 3 ticket and joined TNPA 19 years ago as a trainee tug master in Cape Town.

Selected to go to Rotterdam in 2002 on the marine pilot programme, Cloete did her practical training in Durban after obtaining her licence as a tug master in the Port of Cape Town and went on to get her first licence as a marine pilot in June 2004, becoming the second female marine pilot in Durban. “I was fortunate to follow in the footsteps of Theresa Williams, the first female pilot in Africa, who made me realise that it can be done. I had a few mentors who encouraged me to keep going and gave me the confidence to do my best and overcome the obstacles and challenges this career path presented. As a woman, I had to prove to the male pilots that I could do the job and that I was not afraid to get the job done,” she said.

“Being a marine pilot is mentally and physically challenging which requires you to be completely invested in what you are doing to ensure that the job is done safely. You have to have presence – speak and give orders confidently in a voice that is loud enough to be heard. You have to stand in your authority so people listen and obey your instructions.”

Captain Cloete was put to the test when she was posted to Cape Town in 2004. “I was the first female pilot in the wardroom and banged heads with a number of the men.” She fought the battles and together they worked through their differences. She spent six years in the Port of Cape Town where she also acted as Deputy Harbour Master until 2010, before being posted to Mossel Bay as a Marine Operations Manager/marine pilot. She was appointed the port’s Harbour Master in April 2014.

As someone who fulfilled her dream, she is excited for the youngsters out there. “The maritime environment has changed completely. There is much greater awareness amongst the youth of the career opportunities it offers through the career days and career exhibitions we host.”

“Training today is focused and efficient with the use of simulators, providing trainees with virtual experiences where they learn what to do in different conditions, without the same degree of risk, before going to working on an actual vessel.”

“We are in the fourth industrial revolution. Our Integrated Port Management System is making it possible for our ports to work with near real time information to improve efficiencies.”

“Everything is moving towards complete automation. We are also using more powerful tugs enabling us to ensure quicker turn-around times and to cater for the increased sizes of vessels being built. We need agile and innovative leaders and to always be on top of our game in this industry to ensure global competitiveness while maintaining safety standards.”
The support Captain Kgadi Matlala received from her mentors helped transform her from a young woman living in a land-locked province, into a formidable woman in leadership at the Port of East London.

Captain Matlala is Harbour Master at the Port of East London – a goal she achieved through hard work and determination, with the support of mentors, who were willing to share their knowledge and skills and gave selflessly of their time.

Limpopo-born Matlala joined TNPA’s Port of Port Elizabeth in 2007, where she worked as a trainee tug master, tug master, marine pilot and later, served as Deputy Harbour Master, before taking up her current role.

“In my time, I have had a lot of mentors and learned from a lot of people in the maritime field. The first was Desmond Basson, Marine Technical Manager in the Port of Port Elizabeth. He was a tug master at the time and taught me everything about port operations especially the admin side. Most of us mariners don’t enjoy paperwork much, but he was one person who really set me up for success,” Captain Matlala said.

“Another was Captain Brynn Adamson who I worked with for eight years. I had the privilege of working with him as a Deputy Harbour Master. He taught me a lot about leadership, how to create a conducive environment for people and the importance of seeing the whole team win. He played a crucial role in my training and in shaping the person I am today as a Harbour Master.”

Another important role model and source of inspiration was, Xoliswa Bekiswa, Marine Operations Manager in the Port of Ngqura, one of the first Black women in this role, under whom Captain Matlala worked as both a tug master and marine pilot during her time at the Port of Port Elizabeth.

“I don’t think one can ever really understand the hard work and challenges that the first person goes through. For me, she paved the way. I remember when I started as a pilot and was focusing only on jobs that were required for my next licence, she would always encourage me to do more. I think I obtained my open licence quicker thanks to her motivation and encouragement.”

The support she received throughout her own journey, has fuelled Captain Matlala’s passion for helping younger employees thrive in the space. Her advice to youth looking to join the industry is: “Find a mentor, work hard and have fun!”

“We are here to help you. The company has worked so hard to transform. I started as a cadet – somebody like me from Limpopo, who had never been to the sea before or even seen the ocean, is now working in the port system. The same opportunities that I had are available to the youth of today.”
What stands out for him most is the growing number of women in the maritime industry in key roles such as tug masters, marine pilots and harbour masters.

As one of the older harbour masters in the port system, Quenton Brink, who has been in the marine industry for 32 years, 23 of them with TNPA, witnessed the rapid pace of change during his tenure.

He ascribes the success of TNPA’s women in marine operations to the stringent selection criteria that TNPA uses.

As he was leaving TNPA to take up a position as a marine advisor at the Port of Palma, in northern Mozambique, he said a memory he would take with him was ‘seeing the faces of the women in this room (at the Harbour Masters Forum), many of whom I have trained, and where they are now.’
We salute the fallen heroes and those who have since left TNPA, who also contributed to the struggle for transformation in the organisation and made it a better organisation to work for.

Joseph Mbatha – Marine Pilot - Deceased
Andrew Mautaung – Marine Pilot - Deceased
Ravi Naicker – Harbour Master: Ports of Richards Bay and Cape Town
Karl Otto – Deputy Harbour Master
Neil Chetty – Harbour Master
Eddie Bremner – Chief Harbour Master
Neil Brink – Chief Harbour Master
Mike Brophy – Chief Harbour Master - Deceased
Mogamat (Sanks) Plaatjies – MSoE, Senior Manager: Port Elizabeth

In memory of Joseph Mbatha and Andrew Mautaung, TNPA trailblazers and members of the Class of 99.

Your enthusiasm, discipline and determination live on through a new generation of South African mariners. Your contributions to South Africa’s maritime transformation journey will not be forgotten.
In 1992, when I was Port Captain in Richards Bay the National Ports Authority’s tug masters and pilots mostly had Certificates of Competency as Master Mariners, having served on foreign going cargo ships for about 10 years. They were mostly White South Africans, except for a sprinkling of expats.

To become a marine pilot in those days would take about 14 years.

We needed to make a start to bring previously disadvantaged South Africans into the maritime space.

After interviewing my lower grade marine staff to find out who would like to continue their studies up to matric level maths and science, four candidates were identified - two for deck officer training – Alex Miya (Harbour Master: Port of Cape Town) and Joseph Mbatha (now deceased), and two for engineer officer training. They attended the local technical high school in Richards Bay, and from there, Alex and Joseph proceeded to Natal Technikon and on to ships as Deck Officer cadets, passing the required Department of Transport (SAMSA) examinations and practical oral tests.

While not directly involved in the Rotterdam initiative, nor part of the the selection process, I pushed for Alex and Joseph to be included.

As I recall Alex and Joseph plus some other trainees returned to Richards Bay for their practical pilot training after the Rotterdam experience. It was my privilege to issue Joseph his first pilotage licence in Richards Bay, which was the highlight of my career. It was a very emotional moment for both of us and he also went on to get his open pilotage licence in Richards Bay. As such he could pilot the biggest ships in the port - the bulk carriers - which are huge vessels.

Alex followed in Joseph’s footsteps, then quickly rose to Harbour Master in Saldanha Bay and eventually Harbour Master Cape Town. I am extremely proud of what they achieved, always remembering that they did the hard work, not me. I merely pointed the team in the right direction. They made huge personal sacrifices, being away from their families, working for reduced pay, putting in many hours of study and hard work, and experienced the loneliness of working on their own.

It is wonderful to see what successes the Class of 99, the first candidates in the Rotterdam initiative, have made of their careers, and what a great contribution they are making to the economy of the country.

Transnet was a White male dominated company. The new management brought a new perspective in inter-personal relations that was a privilege for me to experience. They gave of themselves when they did not need to. There was a generosity of spirit in all staff members and I count myself lucky to have experienced it.
This publication was produced to commemorate Transnet National Ports Authority’s rich maritime heritage and twentieth year of existence as a Transnet operating division.