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'Unacceptable' Moz scanning charges draw WTO disapproval

High level lobbying continues

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DESPITE HIGH-LEVEL lobbying, no final government decision has been made on appeals against Mozambique's universal imposition of a fee for electronic scanning of all cargoes travelling through the Port of Maputo – charged whether cargo is scanned or not.

According to Brenda Horne, CEO of the Maputo Corridor Logistics Initiative (MCLI) – which is leading the local opposition – the scanning fee will impose "what can only be described as a tax" in excess of US\$6-million (R43.8-m) a year on businesses using the Maputo Corridor at current port throughput levels.

But, she told FTW, after a further four months of negotiation with the government, the problem of this extra cost still remained – seriously

impacting on freight costs and delaying several major future investments in Maputo port by SA and Mozambican industry.

The problem is that Kudumba – the company appointed by the government to operate the scanning procedure – has imposed what is referred to as "a service charge" on all cargo passing through the Port of Maputo, whether scanned or not.

Effectively, all containers in-and-out of the port are levied with a scanning charge, along with all the other cargoes like bagged products and bulk cargo.

The IMF and World Bank have complained at government level that this scanning policy has not followed international standards and that charges being imposed on all cargo are "unprecedented and unacceptable".

Although the business

world has hit out at the universal nature of scanning charges in Mozambique, it has no objection to the basic concept of electronic scanning, according to Horne.

"Non-intrusive cargo scanners are used worldwide in ports by customs authorities to detect goods on which customs duty would otherwise not have been paid," she told FTW, "and, therefore, they are welcome in Mozambique.

"But, in only a very small percentage of ports are charges imposed on customers – and then only for containers which have been actually scanned."

And the normal interpretation amongst international port operators is to scan only a random selection of containers, generally on pre-advice from police or customs authorities.