SA ports 'losing business' to Maputo

- Sturrock cites less red tape
- Easier traffic to Jo'burg
- Higher cost efficiency

Slindile Khanyile
Durban

South African ports were losing market share to Maputo, which was more cost effective and less bureaucratic, Andrew Sturrock, the managing director at Sturrock Shipping, said yesterday.

Sturrock said the volume of goods passing through Maputo, the bulk of which were going either from or to South Africa, had increased dramatically.

This applied mainly to containerised goods, coal, scrap metal destined for export, and sugar products from Swaziland.

"Our ports have run out of capacity and infrastructure is stretched," he said. "Trade from Mozambique is almost nothing; it's goods that are either coming to or from South Africa. Mozambique is efficiently run because it is partly privatised ... Anything that is run privately or semiprivately, bureaucracy decreases, there are better decisions and they are made quicker."

The Maputo port is 51 percent owned by Grindrod and Dubai Ports World, with the balance in the hands of the Mozambican government.

Sturrock said that the distance between Johannesburg and Mozambique also made the Maputo port more favourable.

"Not only that, but the trucks can go in there, deliver the goods and turn around quickly.

"In Durban, a truck is stuck for at least 12 hours because of the congestion.

"We need to see more public-private partnerships, because private stakeholders bring in a wealth of experience or may be partnering with another country, like Singapore."

Other stakeholders in the South African shipping industry do not share Sturrock's view.

Dave Rennie, the managing director at Grindrod Freight Services, said his company believed Maputo was a complementary port for local ports and part of a network that served the region.

"I would not describe it as a direct competitor port," said Rennie. "Maputo is well positioned to service its hinterland, and is connected to the road and rail networks leading to South Africa, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Swaziland.

"Maputo port provides an additional gateway to markets for importers and exporters."

Fred Jacobs, a corporate relations director at Safmarine and Maersk, said the challenges highlighted by Sturrock were issues Transnet was aware of and was addressing. "We are finding [Transnet] to be customer oriented and really making an effort to address customer requirements."

The Durban port requires trucks to take as long as 12 hours to turn around, according to Sturrock Shipping

PHOTO: SIMPHIWE MBOKAZI

The transport parastatal will spend R18.4 billion over five years to increase capacity and improve efficiency at ports around the country. This includes the construction of the port of Ngqura and the widening of the Durban harbour entrance channel.

Transnet had not responded to Business Report questions at the time of going to press.

South Africa, Mozambique and Swaziland have formed a non-profit organisation to promote and develop the Maputo Development Corridor as the region's primary logistics transport route.