



transport

Department:
Transport
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



Speaking notes by the Deputy Minister of Transport

Mr. Mkhuleko Hlengwa, MP

At the SAIMI October Transport Month engagement

**Nelson Mandela University, Oceans Campus, Gqeberha, Eastern Cape
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Good morning to our Programme Director, Chairpersons, esteemed colleagues, industry representatives, and all distinguished guests.

It is an honor to stand before you today, especially during the October Transport Month, a time when we highlight the critical role that transport plays in driving economic growth, enhancing livelihoods, and ensuring South Africa's connectivity to the global economy. Today, however, we focus on the maritime sector, which is both a vital part of our transport infrastructure and a key to unlocking the full potential of the ocean economy.

Two days ago, I had the opportunity to participate in an important engagement hosted by SAMSA, where we discussed the wreck removal of the MV Ultra Galaxy, which ran aground on the West Coast. This incident, while unfortunate, serves as a valuable lesson and reminder of the risks we face in our waters. It also provided an opportunity for us to assess whether we are truly prepared for such maritime incidents.

The discussions raised some fundamental questions in my mind, particularly around our readiness in terms of equipment and skills. The Chairperson of SAMSA rightly asked: "Are we adequately equipped to handle these types of incidents?" The answer to that question requires reflection and action.

The events of the past few months have shown us just how volatile the maritime environment can be. Since July, we have had to respond to no fewer than six major maritime incidents along our coastline, ranging from fires onboard vessels to mutinies and the loss of containers overboard. Several vessels sought shelter in our ports, including Ngqura, and these were primarily internationally trading ships. This underscores the critical importance of preparedness—not just in terms of having the right equipment but also in terms of possessing the skills to effectively manage these incidents. The Ultra Galaxy incident has emphasized the need for us to build a resilient system capable of preventing and

mitigating maritime risks, especially in the face of increasing challenges such as climate change, which is making our seas more unpredictable and dangerous.

Transport Month, with its focus on enhancing all transport sectors, provides the ideal platform for us to elevate these issues and prioritize action.

As we gather here today at SAIMI, I am reminded of the second question raised by the Chairperson of SAMSA: "Do we have the skills capacity to prevent incidents like the Ultra Galaxy from occurring?" This is where today's discussion becomes particularly relevant.

SAIMI was established to address the very skills gap we are talking about—the gap that exists between what the maritime industry needs and what is currently being produced. Our country has the potential to become a significant player in the global maritime economy, but this will only happen if we can develop and maintain a workforce with the right skills.

As we speak, South African ports are handling vessels engaged in international voyages. These ships face modern navigational challenges, heightened by climate change and shifting global trade patterns. It raises a critical question: Are we, as a country, prepared to equip our workforce with the requisite skills to meet these challenges head-on?

Government policy is clear on the importance of maritime skills development. The Comprehensive Maritime Transport Policy of 2017 explicitly states that the maritime sector has the potential to become a major industry, generating employment and foreign exchange for South Africa. It acknowledges that achieving this goal requires competent people, both at sea and ashore.

To support this, the policy proposes the establishment of Maritime Centres of Excellence, designed to equip South Africa with the specialized skills needed for the sector. The involvement of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) in shaping curricula is critical to ensure that we provide the skills necessary for both local and international markets.

In line with this, SAIMI plays a fundamental role in bridging the gap between academic institutions and the maritime industry, ensuring that we produce skilled professionals who can compete on the global stage.

The government's Medium-Term Plan highlights three apex priorities that must guide our actions: inclusive economic growth and job creation, optimizing the social wage, and ensuring a capable and

developmental state. In the maritime context, these priorities fall under the purview of the Minister of Transport, and by extension, myself.

To achieve these goals, the entire maritime ecosystem—from SAMSA to SAIMI, from training institutions to industry players—must work together to develop and deliver the skills our economy needs. The Department of Transport, SAMSA, DHET, and other key players such as the Transnet National Ports Authority (TNPA), the Ports Regulator, and the National Skills Fund all have a role to play in this ecosystem.

Today's engagement provides an opportunity to have an honest discussion about where we are as a maritime nation and how we can improve. The incidents we've dealt with over the past few months, including the Ultra Galaxy, have given us a glimpse of the potential risks ahead. But they also present an opportunity—an opportunity to build a resilient, future-ready maritime workforce that can safeguard our coastline, our economy, and our international standing.

SAIMI was created to be the cornerstone of that effort, and I look forward to seeing it continue to fulfill its mandate by developing the high-quality skills that South Africa needs to thrive in the global maritime sector. While SAMSA ensures our regulatory framework is strong, SAIMI must ensure that our workforce is equally robust.

Let us use this Transport Month to reaffirm our commitment to building the skills capacity that will enable South Africa to fully realize its maritime potential, and in doing so, create jobs, enhance our competitiveness, and ensure the safety of our waters. I look forward to our discussions today and to the solutions that will emerge from this forum. Thank you!