

44 Herbert Baker Street
Groenkloof
Pretoria, 0181
South Africa

+27 (0)83 412 0287
www.sacota.co.za
Registration Number: 1930/02235/08



6 June 2022

PRESS RELEASE

MAIZE EXPORT COVID VESSEL CRISIS DEFUSED

South African Bulk Terminals (SABT) reported on Friday that the maize export vessel, the *Bao Xiang Ling*, had been grounded due to an outbreak of Covid on board. The vessel had been ready to sail on Thursday night after having completed its load of white maize at the SABT Island View bulk grains export terminal. In terms of the Transnet National Ports Authority (TNPA) Covid protocols, the vessel had to be placed under quarantine for seven days. This also prevented a harbour pilot from boarding the vessel to move it to a lay-by berth or outer anchorage where it could wait out the quarantine period. Fortunately, if the necessary safety precautions could be put in place to guarantee the safety of the harbour pilot, he may board the vessel to move it off the berth.

Freeing up the berth for the next vessel was critical. The maize export programme is already running behind schedule due to the KZN floods and the late rains experienced. If a supramax deep-sea bulk grain vessel (50,000 – 60,000 tons) cannot load due to problems experienced in the harbour or at the terminal, the ship owner would typically charge demurrage cost, currently approximately \$40,000 per day. However, there are also various secondary negative consequences for exporters, logistical operators and farmers if the export programme is unnecessarily delayed.

After some intense negotiations and collaboration between SACOTA management, TNPA, the shipping agent, the exporter and SABT, an agreement was reached. The harbour pilot boarded on Saturday afternoon and the vessel cleared the berth. This was a good result for all involved.

Dr André van der Vyver
Executive Director

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