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The Urgency of Berth Deepening at the Port of Durban

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Abstract : One of the major problems the Port of Durban is experiencing is addressing shallow spots aggravated by megaships that berth. In the recent years, the vessels that call at the Port have increased in size which calls for draughts that are much deeper. For this reason, these larger vessels can only berth under high tide to avoid the risk of running aground. In addition to this, the ships cannot sail in fully laden which does not make it feasible for ship owners. Further during the berthing materials are displaced from the seabed which result in shallow spots being developed. The permitted draft (under-keel allowance) for the Durban Container Terminal (DCT) is currently 12.2 m. Transnet National Ports Authority (TNPA) are currently investing in a dredging fleet worth almost two billion rand. One of the highlights of this investment would be the building of grab hopper dredger that would be dedicated to the Port by 2017. TNPA are trying various techniques to dissolve the reduction of draughts by implementing dredging maintenance projects but is this sufficient? The ideal resolution would be the deepening and widening of the berths. Plans for this project is in place, but the implementation process is a matter of urgency. The intention of this project will be to accommodate three big vessels rather than two which in turn will improve the turnaround time in the port. The berthing will then no longer depend on high tide to avoid ships running aground. The aim of this paper is to prove the implementation of deepening and widening of the Port of Durban is a matter of urgency. If the plan to deepen and widen the berths at DCT is delayed it will mean a loss of business for the South African economy. If larger vessels cannot be accommodated in the Port of Durban, it will bypass the busiest container handling facility in the Southern hemisphere. Shipping companies are compelled to use larger ships as opposed to smaller vessels to lower port and fuel costs. A delay in the expansion of DCT could also result in an escalation of costs.

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