

COMMENT



The Smit Amandla currently operates as a stand-by tug to respond to marine emergencies along the South African coast. The Department of Transport has called for input on the country's coastal salvage strategy and it will be interesting to see whether this function will be undertaken privately or by the State in the future.

The deaths of fishermen who lost their lives in an incident involving a Viking Fishing vessel towards the end of September will once again foist safety at sea into the spotlight for the fishing sector.

South Africa has not seen such significant loss of life in one single incident since the *MFV Lindsay*, also a Viking Fishing vessel, collided with a tanker and sank claiming 14 lives in 2005.

Our condolences go out to the friends, colleagues and families of the deceased in the *MFV Lincoln* incident.

Perhaps rather ironically Sea Harvest had just launched their first television commercial in many years that romanticises the life of fishermen at sea – with the catch line at the end of the advert that has one fisherman referring to the sea and the vessel as his “home”.

Sadly 11 fishermen on the *MFV Lincoln* did not make it home and the South African Maritime Safety Authority (SAMSA) has launched an inquiry into the incident. But the incident does highlight the treacherous nature of the South African coastline and underscores the necessity of maintaining the systems that are in place to respond to a maritime emergency.

Recently the National Department of Transport has twice called for interested parties to develop a salvage strategy for the South African coastline. The second advertisement in the Government Gazette effectively extended the deadline for submissions to mid-October. Time will tell whether they are able to successfully appoint a service provider or will extend the call further.

One cannot help but wonder, however, as to whether the task to develop such a strategy should not fall within the ambit of SAMSA. They are, after all, the maritime safety experts and are on-hand in every major incident that the coastline faces.

Irrespective of who ultimately puts pen to paper in this regard, it will be interesting to see whether a new coastal salvage strategy will include the scope to appoint someone with similar powers to the United Kingdom's SOSREP. The SOSREP has developed a rather glorified position of notability amongst those involved in the salvage sector and the calls to fashion such a position within the Department of Transport or SAMSA have long been circulating in South Africa.

It's clear that the success of the stand-by tug cannot be questioned, but a revamped salvage strategy may well call for an eye to be cast as to whether the State will procure a tug for this function in the future or whether it will go out to tender again when the *Smit Amandla's* contract ends. And, given the critical role played by helicopter services in salvage operations, thought may even be given to placing a helicopter on stand-by along the coast.

From the award of potential tenders to the SAMSA Maritime Industry Awards that were scheduled to take place in November. Some logistical challenges at the venue have seen us move the event back to February next year – giving the industry plenty more time to nominate worthy recipients. Nominations will now only close in mid-December to allow for judging and the announcement of finalists in January. It has been pleasing to see the caliber of nominations that have already been made – and it is clear that the judges will have their work cut out for them.

Colleen Jacka, editor

EDITOR'S CHOICE

RECOMMENDED READS:
Read about Swaziland's aspirations to build a seaport on page 18. Reports say that the Cabinet supports a scheme to dig a canal from the sea in Mozambique to the landlocked country.

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