

COMMENT

■ EDITOR'S CHOICE:

RECOMMENDED READS:

SA AGULHAS II: We had the opportunity to join the SA Agulhas II in Port Elizabeth. Read what we experienced on our trip to Cape Town on page 63.

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It would have been great to delay going to print and wait for the Public Protector's report to be made public, but we were late enough as it was. By the time we hit the street, however, it is likely that this report will be in circulation – well we certainly hope so. I also hope that it brings some clarity to the issue of the patrol tender and allegations of corruption within the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries.

The minister has dominated the media for much of the year. Not many of the reports have been very flattering and she has been attacked from all quarters. Most recently she has denounced criticism of the way she runs the department and described it as a "campaign" to distract her from the truth.

The truth is something we are keenly interested in too. To this end, we issued an invite to both Tina Joemat-Pettersson and Pieter van Dalen to participate in a public and professional debate on the subject that has plagued her department for over a year. Fisheries governance is a topic we would like to hear her perspective on.

An immediate acceptance from Van Dalen saw us wait only a day for a response from the Minister's spokesperson who told us that they were consulting her diary. Unfortunately, at the time of going to press, no date had been set, but we do look forward to hosting such an event. And perhaps to host it in the light of the released Public Protector's report would be more appropriate.

While the media never misses an opportunity to focus the spotlight on the Fisheries Minister, they missed an opportunity to focus on an altogether more inspirational lady – the new *SA Agulhas II*.

I joined the vessel in Port Elizabeth after her shake-down cruise and was alarmed to learn that most of the media invited on the trip to Cape Town had declined simply because they had to pay for their own airfare to meet the vessel. The media missed out on a first hand opportunity to experience a state-of-the-art vessel at sea.

She really is quite special. Comfortable, spacious and equipped with everything the crew and scientists need to keep South African ocean science at the forefront of international research. Presentations from the scientific crew on board made it clear that this is exactly what they are aiming to do.

But, having sailed on numerous vessels along our coast including one of the new Navy frigates as well as one of Safmarine's old Big Whites, I can honestly say that the *SA Agulhas II* is a fantastic representation of what new technology has accomplished.

The fact that I almost missed our entry into the port of Cape Town while eating breakfast is testament to the very real difference that modern engines can make to the comfort levels of seafarers. There was also a distinct reduction in emissions – especially if I reflect on being caught downwind

from a funnel on some of my other trips.

Of course networking technology and even the development of flatscreen televisions has meant that the life of a seafarer is changing for the better. It's just much easier to fit a flatscreen into a small space than it would have been to house one of the old-school chunky televisions.

Speaking about improved "living conditions", the Maritime Labour Convention received its 30th signatory which means that it will come into effect in 12 months time and probably benefit millions of seafarers.

South Africa has yet to sign the convention. It's a sad fact considering that we are now seeing a push from agencies such as the South African Maritime Safety Authority and their partners to promote the opportunities that exist at sea.

Issues such as this, along with our general legislative tardiness, were addressed at the groundbreaking South African Maritime Industry Conference (SAMIC) in July. SAMIC created a huge upwelling of energy in the industry at the time, but the clock is ticking and some sort of follow-up communication and action needs to start happening before we lose the optimism that was garnered.

I would call on the industry to become involved; to join the maritime conversation in whatever capacity they can to ensure that not only the South African, but the African maritime aspirations can be realised.

Quite simply, if we do not do it – the rest of the world will not waste any time in making their business strategies reflect the opportunities on the continent. In our feature on servicing the offshore industry, I slipped in a press release that caught my eye which describes Aker's announcement to build a 1700 strong engineering hub to support global offshore development.

Although based in London with an immediate focus on the more traditional offshore markets, it is clear that their eye is in on the global offshore footprint. Where is Africa's answer to this?

If anything - over the last few months many questions have been asked about our maritime capacity, efficiency, cost, infrastructure, training and just about every other aspect of the industry. We look forward to seeing the maritime sector on the continent find those answers.

Colleen Jacka, editor

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