

Bidfreight Unveils Africa's Fastest Grain Ship Unloader

Monday, 6 November 2006

Bidfreight, the freight management arm of the listed Bidvest Group, today (Monday, November 6 2006), commissioned Africa's fastest and largest grain ship unloader as its bulk terminal operations in Durban harbour set a new benchmark for berth occupancy efficiency.

The SKT ship unloader from Buhler of Switzerland can handle 800 tons of free-flowing cargo an hour. Its specifications enable efficient discharge from ships up to 80 000 tons deadweight tons. This will enable SABT to handle vessels of Panmax size at both their Durban terminals.

The ultra-modern technology, with a discharge rate of 18 000 tons a day, will reduce average berth occupancy at the SABT MW5 terminal from 26 days to 10 days per month. The system is designed for single operator operation.

The R45-million investment completes Phase I of the SABT terminal modernisation programme, a strategic commitment by Bidfreight to further improve bulk handling efficiency and service delivery at its South African Bulk Terminals subsidiary on Maydon Wharf.

Phase I also included upgrading of all conveyors and electrical reticulation and the installation of new crane rails in order to accommodate the additional weight of the new unloader.

Last year, Bidfreight commissioned six new grain silos on the SABT site. A further R5 million was spent upgrading the plant to all weather loading and improving landside traffic flows. During November piling will commence for the building of an additional six grain silos at a total installed cost of R50 million.

The standard design of the SKT unloader was modified to Bidfreight specifications, that included the uprating of the crane lifting capacity from 10 to 15 tons and the installation of video feeds to ensure safe and efficient operation. Advanced safety features include a fully enclosed cab with computerised controls, plant interlocking and safety features such as overload sensors, and warning devices.

The new technology will operate in tandem with Bidfreight's existing Maydon Wharf bulk cargo unloader, a system installed in 1976 with a hourly capacity of 290 tons. They are Africa's only mechanical unloaders south of Mombasa. The combined discharging capability of the two unloaders is 23 500 tons per day.

Koos Smith, managing director of SA Bulk Terminals, said: "Our unloading capacity at the wharf will increase to 250 000 tons a month or three million tons a year. That's more than the combined capacity of all other bulk terminals in South Africa.

"For importers, these efficiency gains on the berth translate into significant freight savings."

Bidfreight specified an SKT mechanical chain elevator unloader in preference to a pneumatic or grab unloader in view of performance and environmental factors.

Benefits include the soft handling of fragile cargoes such as malt and rice, conveyor efficiency, low noise levels, fully enclosed conveying systems and the ability to handle difficult-to-handle cargo such as oil cakes and fertiliser.

The new unloader is capable of handling fully laden Panamax sized vessels but this benefit will only come to fruition when the Port of Durban deepens the Maydon Wharf berths. Until such time SABB will have to lighten Panamax sized vessels at their Island View terminal before shifting the vessel to the Maydon Wharf terminal. The SABB Island View 3 terminal is the only sub-Saharan grain terminal presently capable of handling a fully laden Panamax vessel, typically 230 metres long, with a beam of 32 metres and a draft requirement of 11,8 metres.

Koos Smith added: "Improving port efficiencies is a national priority as it improves our global competitiveness and also reduces pipeline costs on imports to the benefit of the consumer. The NPA is to be saluted for committing to a major capital expenditure programme to facilitate the handling of larger vessels in the Port of Durban. This is a strategic process and will take some time but must be included in the future planning of private sector fixed investment. SABB is known for developing innovative solutions and is proud to give a lead by installing new capacity and seeking new efficiencies. Our terminals compare favourably with the best in the world."

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