

New coastal bunker barge operational in Richards Bay

Amber II, now serving as a floating storage and fuel replenishment vessel for BP customer vessels at the Port of Richards Bay, is South Africa's first coastal bunker barge.



Since 8 November 2017, the 6,000 tonne, 105 metre long Amber II has delivered more than 43,000 tonnes of product to 94 vessels. It is owned by BP while African Marine Solutions (Amsol) handles the logistics and scheduling.

The barge supplies marine fuel and marine gas oil at rates up to 550 litres per hour, with a barge capacity of 5,700 litres for fuel and 800 litres for gas oil.

Port of Richards Bay port manager Preston Khomo said: “Amber II is helping to ensure adequate bunkering services to vessels calling at the port, saving them costs that would have been incurred if they were to refuel at other ports, which was often very prohibitive. For the past two years, the Port of Richards Bay has had challenges because we had only one bunker point. The bunker barge Smit Energy – which is also operated by Amsol – is stationed at the port’s Small Craft Harbour but has to share Berth 209 with tankers due to limited space within the port.”



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Amber II remains at outer anchorage and only enters port when a vessel requires bunkering services. After refuelling a vessel, the coastal barge returns to outer anchorage.

BP said in a statement shortly after the vessel's arrival: "The introduction of this barge will help alleviate stock outs and give the bunker market reliable, flexible supply - safely and efficiently."

Transnet National Ports Authority (TNPA) granted Amsol a licence to operate the coastal barge after a year of negotiations. BP and Amsol had to commit to a progressive plan to create employment opportunities for South Africans on the barge within the next two years, including employing a local officer.

Presently, Amber II has a predominantly foreign crew of around 20 with one South African. Amsol will train South Africans and provide crewing services going forward.



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Ben Coxworth 9 Apr 2018



When the barge requires refuelling it sails the eight to ten-hour journey from Richards Bay to the BP refinery in Durban, to load fuel at Sapref Island View Berths 6, 7, and 8, before returning.

TNPA is also working on granting pilot exemption to Amber II so that the vessel is able to move in and out of port in future, without having to take a pilot on board.

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