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BOX STOPPAGES

Growing growl of grumbles over box stoppages

Alan Peat

In recent weeks, FTW has been deluged by a flood of complaints from readers about the fast-accelerating rate of lengthy container stoppages and examinations by the SAPS Border Police.

Most of these came from Durban-based complainants, but FTW has also been informed that these time- and money-consuming activities

are even more prevalent in Gauteng.

And add to that a growing growl of grumbles from importers, agents and shipping companies about an escalating number of box stoppages also being conducted by both the SA Revenue Service (Sars) customs and the National Regulator for Compulsory Specifications (NRCS).

All this has led to a host of container delivery delays,

dissatisfied importers and their seriously inconvenienced customers, and lots of moolah being either laid out for container transport and depot stowage or just plain lost because of the likes of order cancellations or late-delivery fees.

It's all got so bad that an idea floating around amongst the freight industry's various representative bodies is that some sort of legal class action

may be a solution to the SAPS Border Police contribution to this box-stop charade.

However, the general feeling has been that, while accepting this idea 'in principle', this should only be used as a 'method of last resort'. One even told FTW that "interface first" was a better method of reaching a solution.

But legal action is also being considered by individual importers, whose businesses

are being pushed to the edge by the time-consuming Border Police stoppages.

“Stops impact majorly (sic) on my business and are economically disastrous,” said one. “If I don’t deliver to clients on time, I don’t get paid, I can’t pay my suppliers and I can’t pay salaries. Many small businesses relying on imports face the same issues.”

This party even suggested that there was a preference for targeting small/medium businesses because they were “less protected and weaker in their defence”.

But Pat Corbin of the Johannesburg Chamber of Commerce and Industry (JCCI) may have come up with a means of putting a stop to this ever-increasing, and in recent months fast-accelerating, number of boxes stopped by SAPS Border Police inter alia. This a matter of setting one government department against another.

“We are in contact with the SA Association of Freight Forwarders (Saaff) and numerous agents,” he told

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FTW, “who all convey the message that the ad hoc stoppages have a lot to do with inconveniencing the trader and soliciting ‘arrangements’ to facilitate prompt examination/release.

“We have been in discussion with customs for many years regarding them entering into a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the border police on the basis traders are really tired of having their boxes stopped by so many agencies.

“It’s only customs that has a competent risk engine.”

But Corbin’s new scheme was stimulated at a recent breakfast meeting with the minister of economic development, Ebrahim Patel. He pointed

out that Patel was obviously concerned about the effects of these stops on the SA economy.

Indeed, when Corbin suggested that, with all the entities with the power to stop boxes, there could be bribery involved and that it created a great opportunity for extortion, the minister didn’t, as may be expected from a senior government person, reject this outright, but rather “took a great interest”.

“We are co-ordinating input to go back to the minister,” he said.

But the one question that has avoided being answered is just why boxes have been stopped at such an

accelerated pace in recent times. Not just by SAPS, but also by the other entities with such powers in the supply chain.

In discussions with various senior members of the freight industry the answers have been many, but all purely speculative, with some even verging on being slanderous.

However, in a recent edition of Money Web Today, Magnus Heystek, the investment strategist at

Brenthurst Wealth, came up with this answer to this vexing question.

In it he wrote: “SA’s revenue collection over many years has been quite sterling. Year after year we were treated with the luxury of revenue



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– PAT CORBIN

overshoots. Those days are now gone.”

Rather, he slightly misquoted Baroness Margaret Thatcher’s bon mot, and said that “SA was now running out of other people’s money”.

“I would suggest that we now have officially entered that ‘running out of money’ stage. It could also explain this desperate search for more places to plunder by certain execs in the ANC.”

And he believes a part of the shortfall could almost certainly come from the extra revenue-earning potential of an increased number of box stoppages/examinations.

The above Exert take from FTW dated 16 September 2016

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