



ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSIONAL ARTISANS OF SOUTH AFRICA

Craft the Waves: Becoming a Maritime Artisan

Programme Director, Dr. Buthelezi, distinguished guests, educators, learners, and fellow maritime enthusiasts - Sanibonani!

Before I begin, I must express my sincere gratitude to Advocate Lihle Mapipa from the Moses Kotane Research Institute for extending this incredible opportunity to speak about the Association of Professional Artisans of South Africa and the vital role of maritime artisans in our economy. Thank you for your vision in bringing together all these stakeholders to chart a course toward a thriving maritime sector.

This morning, as you drove past Durban's harbour, did you stop to think about the hands that keep those massive vessels moving? The skilled artisans who ensure every weld holds against the ocean's fury, every engine runs precisely, every electrical system powers safely through storms.

These are not just jobs. These are the master craftspeople of the sea - maritime artisans - and they are the backbone of South Africa's blue economy.

The Untold Story of Maritime Artisans

Let me paint you a picture. Right now, at this very moment, somewhere in our ports, a marine electrician is diagnosing a complex electrical fault on a container ship worth hundreds of millions of rand. A marine fitter is precision-machining a critical engine component that must perform flawlessly 5,000 kilometers from the nearest shore. A marine welder is joining steel plates that will withstand pressures most of us cannot imagine.

These artisans hold in their hands not just tools, but the future of global trade, South Africa's economic competitiveness, and the dreams of young people sitting in classrooms right now, wondering where they fit in tomorrow's economy.

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Why Maritime Artisans Matter Now More Than Ever

South Africa has 2,798 kilometres of coastline. We have eight commercial ports that handle billions of rands in cargo annually.

Operation Phakisa has identified our oceans as a trillion-rand opportunity. But here's the challenge - **we have a critical shortage of skilled maritime artisans.**

While everyone talks about the Fourth Industrial Revolution, we're facing a crisis in the trades. The average age of our maritime artisans is rising. Young people are being told that trades are inferior to university degrees. This is not just wrong - it's dangerous for our economy.

The truth? A qualified marine fitter can earn R25,000 to R45,000 per month. A senior marine electrician with specialized skills can command R60,000 or more. These are not entry-level wages - these are careers that build wealth, provide security, and offer genuine advancement.

What Exactly is a Maritime Artisan?

Maritime artisans are specialized tradespeople who work in the marine and maritime industry. They include:

Marine Fitters and Turners - the precision engineers who maintain and repair the mechanical systems that power vessels worth hundreds of millions

Marine Electricians - specialists who work with complex electrical systems, navigation equipment, and increasingly sophisticated digital systems

Marine Welders - craftspeople who must meet the highest standards because their welds literally hold ships together in the harshest environment on Earth

Boatbuilders - artisans who combine traditional craftsmanship with modern materials to create everything from fishing vessels to luxury yachts

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Rigging Specialists - experts in the complex systems that handle cargo, anchors, and safety equipment

Marine Refrigeration Technicians - critical for the fishing industry and vessels carrying temperature-sensitive cargo

The APASA Difference

The Association of Professional Artisans of South Africa stands as the voice and guardian of artisan excellence in our country. We recognize qualified artisans, advocate for proper training standards, and fight for the recognition that artisans deserve.

But more importantly, we're building pathways. We're creating bridges between classrooms and careers, between potential and prosperity, between dreams and reality.

The Maritime Artisan Journey

Let me be honest with you - becoming a maritime artisan is not easy. It requires dedication, precision, and a commitment to excellence. But the journey is clear and achievable:

Step One: Foundation - Start with a solid secondary education, focusing on mathematics, science, and technical subjects. Maritime Studies at school level opens doors.

Step Two: Formal Training - Enroll in a recognized maritime artisan training programme. Institutions like DUT's Maritime Studies programme, technical colleges, and industry-specific training centers offer these pathways.

Step Three: Practical Experience - Complete your apprenticeship or learnerships with registered employers - shipyards, maritime companies, port authorities, and marine engineering firms.

Step Four: Trade Test - Pass your trade test to become a qualified artisan, recognized by the Department of Higher Education and Training.

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Step Five: Specialization - The ocean is vast, and so are the opportunities. Specialize in offshore installations, cruise ships, naval vessels, superyachts, or emerging fields like marine renewable energy.

Step Six: Continuous Learning - The maritime industry evolves constantly. New materials, digital systems, environmental regulations - the learning never stops, and neither does the opportunity for advancement.

Real Opportunities, Real Impact

Today, South Africa needs maritime artisans for:

The **Transnet National Ports Authority** - maintaining and upgrading port infrastructure across eight major ports

Shipbuilding and repair yards - from small craft to naval vessels, our capacity is growing

Offshore oil and gas industry - specialized artisans earn premium wages in this sector

Fishing industry - the largest employer in maritime, with constant need for vessel maintenance

Superyacht industry - Africa's luxury yacht sector is growing, offering international opportunities

Marine renewable energy - wave and tidal energy projects are emerging, creating entirely new career paths

Maritime research vessels - supporting ocean science and environmental monitoring

Naval operations - the South African Navy requires highly skilled artisans

Breaking Down the Barriers

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I know what some of you are thinking. "My child has potential - shouldn't they go to university?" "Isn't artisan work just manual labor?" "Won't robots replace these jobs?"

Let me address these head-on:

University is not the only path to success. Some of the wealthiest, most fulfilled professionals I know are artisans. They own their businesses, employ others, and have skills that artificial intelligence cannot replicate.

Artisan work is intellectual work. You're reading complex technical diagrams, making precision calculations, problem-solving in real-time under pressure, and constantly adapting to new technologies.

Robots cannot replace the judgment, adaptability, and problem-solving skills of a trained artisan. Especially in maritime environments where every vessel is different, every repair is unique, and human expertise is irreplaceable.

A Call to Educators

To the teachers and career counselors here today - you hold tremendous power. When you guide a learner toward maritime artisan training, you're not limiting their potential - you're opening doors to prosperity, purpose, and pride in craftsmanship.

Please:

- Identify learners with technical aptitude and practical intelligence
- Connect them with maritime industry partners
- Celebrate artisan achievements as vigorously as academic ones
- Help families understand the real economic value of artisan careers
- Build relationships with training institutions and employers

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A Call to Industry

To our maritime stakeholders present today - we need you to step up. Offer more apprenticeships. Create structured career pathways. Pay fair wages that reflect the value artisans bring. Invest in training because skilled artisans are investments, not expenses.

Partner with schools and training institutions. Open your facilities for visits. Show young people what maritime artisan careers actually look like. Be the mentors this generation desperately needs.

A Call to Young People

To the learners who might be here or will hear about today's event - if you love working with your hands, solving problems, seeing tangible results from your work, and being challenged every single day, maritime artisan careers are calling you.

You don't need to be average in a career path that doesn't excite you. You can be excellent in a field that needs you, values you, and will reward you.

The ocean is not a limit - it's a horizon of unlimited opportunity.

The Vision Ahead

Imagine a South Africa where every port has a pipeline of skilled maritime artisans. Where our shipyards compete globally because of the quality of our craftsmanship. Where young people from townships and rural areas see maritime artisan training as a guaranteed pathway to the middle class.

This is not a fantasy. This is achievable. But it requires all of us - educators, industry, government, families, and young people themselves - to recognize that artisan excellence is national excellence.

Closing Words

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Later today, you'll visit Durban Port. You'll tour commercial vessels. When you do, I want you to look differently at everything you see. Every weld, every cable, every machined component represents the skill of an artisan.

These artisans crafted the waves of opportunity that our maritime sector rides on.

And the next generation of maritime artisans is sitting in our classrooms right now, waiting for someone to show them the way.

Let today be the beginning of that journey for many young South Africans.

Connect With Us

Before I close, I want to make sure you know that you're not alone on this journey. The Association of Professional Artisans of South Africa - APASA - is here to support you every step of the way.

Whether you're an educator looking for guidance on how to advise your learners, a young person exploring career options, a parent seeking clarity on artisan pathways, or an industry partner wanting to collaborate - we are here for you.

Visit our website at www.apasa-npc.org.za for comprehensive information on artisan careers, training pathways, and industry standards.

Message us on WhatsApp at **079 538 1844** - yes, we're accessible, we're responsive, and we're ready to answer your questions.

Find us on Facebook at **APASA HUB** where we share success stories, opportunities, and build a community of current and aspiring artisans.

We're not just an organization - we're a movement. A community ready to welcome, guide, and celebrate the next generation of maritime artisans.

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The representatives from DUT Maritime Department, Transnet, AMSOL, and all the maritime stakeholders here today are also your resources. Connect with them during the networking session. Ask questions. Express interest. Take that first step.

Final Words

Let us craft not just vessels, but futures.

Let us craft not just careers, but dreams.

Let us craft the waves together.

The ocean is calling. The opportunity is real. The pathway is clear.

All that's needed now is for you to take the first step.

Siyabonga kakhulu. Ngiyabonga. Thank you.

**Nhlanhla Magwaza,
President/Chairperson**

**Association of Professional Artisans of South Africa,
APASA.**

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