160 YEARS OF EXPORT
THE HISTORY OF THE
PERISHABLE PRODUCTS
EXPORT CONTROL BOARD
Gerhard de Beer • Annemarie Paterson • Hennie Olivier
Sailing through the pages of history.

In celebration of 160 years of South African exportation, Safmarine takes great pride appearing in this publication. While we cannot boast a history in shipping as long, our commitment to the safe and timely transportation of goods around the world, has made us a leader on the seas. A feat not made possible without having taken a leaf or two from the history books!

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PERISHABLE PRODUCTS
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The Perishable Products Export Control Board (PPECB) is a statutory body that was established in 1926 by an Act of Parliament. PPECB currently operates under the following Act:


PPECB is also an assignee of the National Department of Agriculture in terms of Act No 119 of 1990, the Agricultural Product Standards Act.
Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

PREFACE

FOREWORD

HISTORICAL TIMELINE

Chapter 1
1841 – 1910: FIRST ATTEMPTS

Chapter 2
1910 – 1930: INTRODUCTION OF REGULATED EXPORT

Chapter 3
1930 – 1950: CHALLENGES & SOLUTIONS

Chapter 4
1950 – 1970: SPACE, RATES AND DISASTERS

Chapter 5
1970 – 1990: CONTAINERISATION AND SANCTIONS

Chapter 6
1990 – 2001: Deregulation and APS Incorporation

THE PPECB IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM

BIBLIOGRAPHY
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Preface

In its early years, export products under the control of the Perishable Product Export Control Board (PPECB) comprised mainly of deciduous and citrus fruit. The product range soon expanded to include marine, meat, flora and other perishable products.

Today, there are over two hundred product types that are exported under its control. The PPECB does not only oversee the export of South African produce, but all perishable produce that passes through South Africa’s ports. This includes products from other Southern African countries such as Botswana, Swaziland, Zimbabwe and Namibia.

In recent years, a number of unusual export products have also been overseen by the PPECB, including duck’s feet, shark fin, a research sample from Antarctica and even human placentas.

Then and now. The PPECB, in 2001, celebrated 75 years of service to the industry.
A letter from Mr Bill Mathews to Mr Roger Dyason in June 1962 concerning detail of the PPECB's history.

Three people were instrumental in the creation of this book: Mr Roger Dyason, member of the PPECB board from 1926 to 1971. Mr Dyason had the foresight to compile a comprehensive document on the PPECB's history before his death. As demonstrated above, Mr Bill Mathews who reported in great detail to Mr Dyason on certain events that occurred during his tenure as the PPECB's Chief Executive from 1945 to 1960.

Lastly, Dr Fanie van Rensburg, he served as board member from 1959 to 2000. On his retirement, Dr van Rensburg expressed the wish that a memorial book be compiled on the history of the PPECB. The present PPECB board commissioned this book in 2003 and the authors were able to conduct several interviews with Dr van Rensburg, who contributed richly.
PPECB’s creation in South Africa during 1926 became necessary as the need for an authority to encourage the export of perishable products intensified during the early part of the previous century. It was established and mandated to determine which shipping companies would be used for export and which perishable products would enjoy priority when assigning space aboard vessels. At the time, export products under PPECB’s control consisted mainly of deciduous and citrus fruit. However, the product range soon expanded and shipping space that had previously been available exclusively to fruit was being shared with meat, eggs, poultry, dairy and other products. Today there are over 230 products on the export list. These exports are certainly one of South Africa’s major assets, since the value thereof is approximately 8 billion S.A. Rands per annum. It is also estimated that the industries that are served by PPECB employ over a million people at all levels of production, processing and distribution. Furthermore, these primary export products are renewed annually and do not exhaust scarce resources.

It is no mean task to attempt to gather the facts over a period of more than one and a half centuries, and to capture the development of an industry from a small beginning to a vast and extensive business. In such an undertaking it is obvious that the names of various people and ventures will be mentioned, however, there are countless leaders and pioneers who played important roles that are faceless or nameless. They include people in the various perishable product industries, shipping lines, government departments and within PPECB itself, all of whom must never be forgotten.

It is also appropriate to remember that, whenever there is mention of perishable products and the marketing thereof, many role players contribute to the chain from farm to fork. Since 1926, PPECB has been a part of this chain, and has indeed been the golden thread in every facet of the development and growth of the industries that we know today.

Probably one of the developments that impacted most dramatically on PPECB was the deregulation of the marketing environment in South Africa in 1997, which placed an exceptional burden on the organisation. New entrants to the industries had to be assisted and coached in the specialised business of perishable product exportation, whilst more than 1 500 inspection points throughout the country had to be serviced. In an unsettled and unstable environment PPECB continued to guide and serve exporters, irrespective of their standing or size, providing the stability that was so desperately needed in the fruit industries at the time. Perhaps PPECB’s commitment was best summarised by the Minister of Agriculture’s comments: “Our opponents argued that deregulation would ruin South Africa’s quality reputation abroad but, with the excellent service of the PPECB, we’ve not only broadened access to the international markets, we have also maintained the high quality standards that we are well known for”.

From a modest beginning in 1926, reporting to the Minister of Transport, PPECB has grown into a well-respected organisation the world over, employing some 300 staff members today. Its offices are spread across the whole country - indeed wherever perishable products are grown. As a dynamic parastatal body working closely with the National Department of Agriculture, PPECB is set to play an important future role, especially with regards to food safety and certification of food supply processes in South Africa and even Africa.

The purpose of this work is to have a record of the past, however, one cannot deny that everything of significance that has been accomplished was done standing on the shoulders of those who preceded us. We pay tribute to them for having the vision to create and grow the PPECB.

Given that South Africa is only some three hundred and fifty years old, then the almost 80 years of existence of the PPECB is a remarkable accomplishment. There are probably few, if any, other statutory organisations that have been around for that long and that are still making a significant contribution in exports.

NINO BURELLI
Chairperson
August 2003
Early Explorations:
- Jan van Riebeeck plants the first fruit trees at the Cape in 1652.
- The Kowie River mouth (Port Alfred) is first used as a commercial port in 1825.
- Port Elizabeth is given port status in 1826.
- The first export from South Africa to Australia proved unsuccessful in 1841.
- Construction begins on the Alfred Basin and a 546 meter breakwater later to become Table Bay harbour in 1860.
- The first harbour construction work begins at the mouth of the Buffalo River in East London in 1872.
- Frigorifique introduces mechanical refrigeration in 1877.
- The first substantial jetty is built at Port Elizabeth in 1881.
- Formation of the first South African Shipping Conference in 1883.
- The first export attempts to England are undertaken in 1886.
- Cape farmers pack their fruit in a variety of containers, such as baskets, wooden vats, brandy cases and wooden packing cases in 1888.
- The grape export attempt on the Grantully Castle fails in 1889.
- The first substantial jetty is built at Port Elizabeth.
- The Cape Orchard Company urges exporters to adopt boxes of uniform size in 1892.
- The Cape Orchard Company's export logo "C.O.C." has become well known and is sought after by retail buyers in London in 1895.
- The Drummond Castle sinks off theBrittany coast of France in 1896.
- The Western Province Fruit Exporters' Association is founded in 1899.
- In March 1900, the Union-Castle Shipping Company is formed.
- The first inland cold store is built in the Hex River Valley by the Cape Orchard Company in 1901.

Jan van Riebeeck planted the Cape's first fruit trees in August 1652. They were to supply fresh produce to passing Dutch East-Indian Company ships.
An American expert predicts that “as a result of irrigation, particularly for fruit culture, 200 million pound per annum might be added to the permanent wealth of South Africa. South Africa is eventually certain to become one of the most important fruit producing countries in the world.”

Exports for the year total 15 000 cases.

Mr. R.J. Bulmer and A.C. Buller, both fruit farmers, are appointed as fruit inspectors of the Western Province Fruit Exporters’ Association. They take turns to inspect the fruit of co-producers who were members of the association.

The first pre-cooling stores in Table Bay Harbour have a capacity of 113 cubic tons.

The Cape Orchard Company has 70 000 fruit trees on its farms in the Hex Valley.

The Cape Government appoints Mr. R.J. Bulmer as inspector. His powers are limited as he can only inspect fruit of those exporters who request the service, and even fruit rejected for export can still be shipped.

The Union-Castle Line ships only pre-cooled fruit.

3 000 cases of South African oranges are sold in Britain. By the following year, this amount tripled to 14 454 cases.

Sir Donald Currie, founder of the Union-Castle Shipping Company, dies at the age of 83.

Parliament promulgates the Uitvoer van Vruchten Wet. A number of citrus farmers in the Rustenburg and Marico district form what was probably the first co-operative citrus grower’s association. They build a packing store near the Rustenburg station and pack their fruit under one name - "Koedoe".

Lt. H.E.V. Pickstone, second from left, leads the Groot Drakenstein Mounted Troop on patrol during the Anglo-Boer War.
1925 A million cases of citrus are exported for the first time. Apples are wrapped in paper bearing the brand of the exporter. New quayside pre-cooling facilities are built on the East Pier in Cape Town's harbour. The Vrugtekwekers Kooperatiewe Beurs charters the cooling vessel Roman Star. This is the first time that a commercial ship is chartered to transport excess fruit from South Africa, and the project is riddled with difficulty and is subject to a host of criticism.

1926 The Perishable Products Export Control Board is founded, taking over responsibility for the shipping of perishable export products, the collection of growers’ estimates and the allocation of pre-cooling and refrigerated shipping space. Mr J.C. le Roux appointed as first Chairperson of the PPECB.

1927 Almost 4 million fruit trees are planted in commercial orchards in the Western Cape. During its first export season, the Deciduous Fruit Exchange ships 1.5 million cases. Skids, the forerunner of today’s pallets, are introduced in Table Bay Harbour. The link between the deciduous and citrus fruit industries is severed. Citrus fruit produced in the Transvaal is exported through Lourenço Marques for the first time. The PPECB’s technical adviser, Mr E.A. Griffiths, makes use of the new refrigeration technology to develop pre-cooling rooms.

1928 The number of citrus trees in South Africa reaches 3 million. Support for the South African Deciduous Fruit Exchange is strong and its 1,200 registered growers supply 87% of all deciduous export fruit.

1929 The PPECB enters into a shipping contract with the Union-Castle Shipping Company.

1930 The two-million mark for the export of deciduous fruit is surpassed. The U.K. is the dominant market, though fruit is also sold on the continent of Europe. The Citrus Exchange appoints Mr B.W. Harlow as its overseas representative.

1931 The Deciduous Fruit Exchange appoints Mr Martin Dykes as its overseas representative.

1934 Direct shipping to Sweden is introduced – now our most important market after the U.K.

1935 The Union-Castle Line orders its first refrigerated cargo ships, the Rothesay Castle and the Roslin Castle to carry South African fruit. The Department of Agriculture, in co-operation with the PPECB, enlists a commission to inspect the problem of parched and rotten peaches. A panel of fourteen “Most important direct receivers of fruit in England” is compiled.

1936 All South African citrus is exported under the name “Outspan”, originally the trademark of citrus produced on the farm Amanzi Estates, owned by Sir Percy Fitzpatrick, the famous author of Jock of the Bushveld. Entirely new pre-cooling stores are completed at B and C berths in the new Duncan Dock, Table Bay harbour.

1937 Dr A.J.M. Smith is appointed as the technical advisor of the PPECB. The PPECB co-ordinates the expansion of export to include a number of new ports around the world. The inability of the Exchange to secure 100% support for its marketing system among exporters drives the Exchange to seek regulatory powers, but agreement cannot be reached.
1939 The development of pre-cooling tunnels, probably the most significant of the technical advancements that took place under Dr A.J.M. Smith's supervision. Development of a dual temperature system for the transportation of certain perishables.

1941 Exports terminated due to World War II.

1947 Mr J.A. Gibson is appointed as Chairperson of the PPECB.

41 Gross value of fruit exports total £1.4 million.

1940 Pre-war exports levels are reached again, with 3.9 million cases shipped. The Hex River Valley is now the most important fruit area, providing 34% of the export volume.

1949 The number of fruit trees in the Cape has reached 8.4 million.

1950 The Conference Lines incorporate both South African Lines and Safmarine. The U.K. remains the dominant market, but fruit is also sold in Sweden, the U.S.A., Eire, Switzerland and, for the first time since the war, in Belgium.

1951 First direct exports to West Germany. Weekly boat pools are introduced for most fruit kinds in place of seasonal pools. The total number of pools increases to 535.

1952 South African citrus breaks its export record – over 5 million cases of citrus are exported at a profit of R17.3 million. First exports to Norway since World War II. Sweden is still the most important market on the Continent.

1953 The Conference Lines appoints a committee responsible for the initial implementation of containers on board conference vessels. This group becomes known as the Swan Committee after the name of the pub in which it meets. A record number of 4 million cases of grapefruit exported. Use of wooden cases for apples is discontinued and only cartons are allowed.

1954 Apricot exports peak at 727 metric tons (153,000 cases), a record that remains until 1989. First exports to Canada and Holland. Citrus prices drop drastically in Britain and it becomes the citrus industry’s “black year”.

1955 Apricot exports peak at 727 metric tons (153,000 cases), a record that remains until 1989. First exports to Canada and Holland. Citrus prices drop drastically in Britain and it becomes the citrus industry’s “black year”.

1956 Union-Castle's mail ship, the Arundel Castle, is the first mail ship to be scrapped after the World War II. The ship’s bell is donated to the PPECB.

1957 Mr Danie Joubert is appointed as Chairperson of the PPECB.

1958 As the 1958 season reaches its peak, a devastating fire destroys the majority of the pre-cooling chambers at the Table Bay harbour. Exports total 7.9 million cases, of which the U.K. takes 73%, Belgium and Scandinavia about 7% each and Germany 5%. First shipments to Denmark and Finland.

1959 Night packing is instituted at the Cape Town harbour to deal with the large amounts of perishable produce available for export.

1960 Aftermath of the 1958 fire.
1974  About 85% of all pears and apples are transported on returnable railway pallets to the docks. The deciduous fruit industry’s plant improvement organisation (SAPO) is founded.

1975  A fire ravishes fifteen pre-cooling tunnels at the Port Elizabeth harbour.

1976  Bulk export terminals at Richards Bay and Saldanha Bay are formally opened.
      The Southern Africa Europe Container Service (SAECS) is formed.
      An inland inspection service for grapes is introduced at Dal Josafat.
      The 50th birthday of the South African Citrus Exchange.
      More than 10 million cartons of apples are exported in one season for the first time.

1977  Official opening of the Conference Line’s container service on 1 July.
      The last mail ship leaves Table Bay and the first export in containers takes place.
      Container terminals are commissioned in Cape Town, Durban and Port Elizabeth.
      A fire destroys thirteen pre-cooling tunnels on A berth at Table Bay docks.
      The shipping rate negotiation system is reviewed.

1978  Cartons replace wooden boxes for grape exports.

1979  A composite carton for peaches and nectarines is introduced.

1980  All stone fruit and 50% of the grape exports are shipped in containers.
      The composite grape carton is the only pack allowed for export.
      Composite cartons for apricots and plums are also introduced.

1981  A label for export grape bunches is introduced.

1982  Exports reach 24 million cases.
      Agreement is reached with shipping companies to standardise on 2.1 m high pallets.

First full commercial export year of yellow-fleshed nectarines.
      The debit-credit quality evaluation scheme is introduced for apples.

1983  The PPECB commercialises.
      The new cold stores in Table Bay Harbour, inland cooling and road transport of fruit become the full responsibility of the Deciduous Fruit Board.

1984  Promulgation of Act number nine of 1983. The act recalled all previous legislation since 1926 and resulted in the commercialisation of the PPECB.
      Dr S.J.J. van Rensburg is elected as Chairperson of the PPECB.
      The offices of the PPECB are moved from the Cape Town harbour to Cape Town Centre.
      The deciduous fruit export industry receives the State President Award for export achievements.
      The Mark IV apple carton is introduced and obtains an award from the S.A. Institute of Packaging.

1985  Nearly 10 million apple trees are counted in the Cape.

1986  The PPECB advises the South African Defence Force on the transportation of their food.

1987  Locally developed Super Gold apricot placed on the Export List.
      The “Jardin du Cap” pack, for extraordinary quality, is launched.
      Universal Frutrade Co-operative is founded which now provide export fruit growers direct shareholding in the industry. Withdrawal from the Antwerp auction.

1988  Late harvest grapes exported for first time and several new local grape varieties are also commercially exported.
      Unifruco acquires the company H. Olff & Sohn in Hamburg and takes over the master agent functions in Germany. It also opens an office in Antwerp, Belgium.

By 1978, the Cape brand was well established and Germany — receiving 24% of our export fruit — had become our second biggest export market.
Historical Timeline
1989 – 2001

1989
Official opening of the PPECB’s new head office building in Plattekloof, near Cape Town.
Lauritzen Reefers develops a new 40-foot container and makes it available to the PPECB for testing.
600 million cartons of fruit exported since World War II.
A new grape carton, with base dimensions to suit the two most common pallets in use, is introduced.
First commercial exports of Royal Gala apples.
The Orange River gains importance as export production area with more than 1 million cartons of grapes exported.

1990
All Cape fruit is now subjected to quality evaluation.
Apricot exports reach 228,000 cartons, surpassing the record volumes of 1954.
Fruit production expands, in particular northward along the Berg River and in the Little Karoo.
Political changes in Europe and South Africa create new opportunities and export volumes reach 34 million cartons.
Safmarine introduces a limited passenger service between South Africa and Southampton on its four large container ships.

1991
Government rules that the PPECB must take over the quality inspection function from the Directorate of Agricultural Product Standards.
In October PPECB incorporates about 100 APS inspectors.
Elgin/Vyeboom is now the major fruit producing area of the Cape, supplying nearly 40% of the export volumes.

1993
A delegation from South Africa visits Japan in November to re-negotiate the terms for export to that country. It opens the door for renewed export to Japan and the Far East.
CFC gases are beginning to be phased out in refrigeration units.

1994
PPECB obtains a building in Grabouw, and after renovation turns it into a Regional office and training centre.

1995
The first consignment of citrus to Japan (using in-transit sterilisation) is shipped during the 1995 season aboard the Amber Cherry.
Deregulation of the fruit industry causes chaos in export markets.
The PPECB convinces European buyers to insist on quality audits.
The PPECB clamps down on illegal exports in order to maintain South African fruit’s good reputation abroad.

1998
A meeting is held between the PPECB and the Conference Lines at Lanzerac Wine Estate in Stellenbosch, where the SAECS contract is rescinded with immediate effect.

2000
A new PPECB board is appointed.
Mr Nino Burelli replace Dr van Rensburg as Chairperson.

2001
PPECB achieves ISO 9001: 2000 certification and becomes the first SA service provider to receive preliminary EUREPGAP accreditation.
Implementation of PPECB’s new R6,0 million Navision™ computer and IT system.
PPECB celebrates 75 years of service to South Africa’s Perishable Products Export Industries.

The PPECB’s head office in Plattekloof, near Cape Town.
Historical accounts show that sailing craft carried bananas from the Caribbean to the North American East Coast as early as the late 1600s. As oranges, lemons and other fruits became more abundant from 1825 onwards, sailing ships carried long-lasting citrus fruits from Spain and other Mediterranean countries to the northern parts of Europe.

The first experimental export of fruit from South Africa took place in 1841. Sir John Molteno, first Prime Minister of the Cape Colony, chartered the brig Comet, loaded a cargo of dried fruits, raisins and "produce of the vine" and sent her to Australia in an abortive endeavour to open up a new market for Cape produce.

Significant improvements in refrigeration technology enabled a breakthrough in 1877. The company Frigorifique, using mechanical refrigeration on board the vessel Paraguay, transported the world’s first cargo of frozen carcasses from Buenos Aires to Rouen. A few years later a refrigerated shipment of Australian mutton arrived in London. By the 1890s, the technology had improved to such an extent that a new shipping sector was heralded — capable of carrying all kinds of perishable products to destinations around the globe.

When the shipping magnate Sir Donald Currie (1825 - 1909) arrived in South Africa at the end of 1887, deputations awaited him at Cape Town and Durban, asking that the Castle ships be fitted with refrigerator space for the conveyance of fruit to

“Never surely in the history of the colony were so many promising experiments reported as at the present time. If only a tenth of them come to anything in the way of practical results, there should be a sufficiency of profitable occupation for every man in the country.”

The Cape Argus of 4 December 1886 on the possibilities of grape export.
England. Sir Donald returned to England in 1888, and towards the end of that year, the R.M.S. Grantully Castle was fitted with a thirty-ton refrigeration chamber.

The 1880s were an era of experimentation concerning the packaging of fruit. Farmers packed their produce in a variety of containers, such as baskets, wooden vats and packing cases and brandy cases. For the Grantully Castle’s voyage, a supply of cork dust — reputed at the time to be the best packing material for fruit — was sent from Lisbon to Cape Town. In February 1889, the Grantully Castle left Table Bay for England with three hundred and twenty boxes of fruit. The shipment consisted chiefly of Muscadel grapes, a poor choice, as the grape is watery and of a delicate nature. The shipment reached England in poor condition, and the experiment was considered a total failure.

It was clear that in order for fruit export to be successful, more knowledge regarding packaging, cooling, fruit types and cultivars (best suited to export) was required. Furthermore, producer rules had to be introduced which would compel sound handling and cooling procedures in order for produce to reach the international market in the best possible condition.

At the time, the Cape Colony had some guidelines concerning the export of perishables, but producers were not obliged to follow them. Fruit aboard the Grantully Castle was not cooled during transportation to the harbour and was not pre-cooled in the docks before shipping.

The following two letters, written by Sir Donald Currie to his Castle Mail & Packets Company agency in Cape Town, demonstrates the hopes, challenges and pioneering spirit that prevailed at the time. The second of the two letters was also forwarded to Percy Molteno, who at the time was spearheading the research and development of the industry in the Cape colony.
3 and 4, Fenchurch Street.

London: 7th Nov., 1891.

E.C.

per "Norham Castle".

Messrs. The Castle Mail Packet Co. Ltd.

Cape Town.

Dear Sir,

Fruit Export from Cape.

With reference to your favor of 7th ult., we confirm our latest advices as to the fitting of special Fruit chambers in the Mail Steamer appointed to leave Capetown on 27th January, 24th February and 9th March next.

We have noted with interest all the details given by you as to the Fruits or available for export at different seasons, and we hope that the result of the first experiments will be such as to encourage a large future development of the business.

Our present object is to correct an apparent misapprehension as to the disposal of the space in the Fruit chambers. Naturally, we are desirous that the experiments should be...
be made under the most favorable conditions as to packing, and we therefore wish you to place at the disposal of Mr. Mottensoe's syndicate, or those whose shipments are made under his guidance, as much space as possible, and at least two-thirds of the whole capacity of the chambers, the remainder being allotted to others who may wish to make trial shipments on their own account.

In addition to the specially-fitted chambers, and with the object of enabling the Syndicate to make continuous experiments during the coming season, we shall arrange to set apart for fruit 10 cubic feet of space in the cool chamber of the 'Dunottar Castle' and of all subsequent Mail and Intermediate Steamers which have refrigerators, and you will please inform Mr. Mottensoe of this.

We are, Dear Sir,

Yours faithfully,

Donald Currie & Co.

As to temperature and storage, we shall write you fully, if possible by next mail.
Sir,

I am pleased to communicate to your attention the successful arrival of the first consignment of fruits from the Cape, consisting of apples and pears.

With reference to your favor of 1st October, and further to our letters of 10th instant, we now beg to say in reference to the temperature to be maintained in the Chambers, that we propose a temperature of 40°. We find that the 'Australian' boats, bringing apples, have a temperature not exceeding 35°, and not less than 25°, but we think it would be well to adopt in our Chambers the temperature above named in view of the fact that the Cape fruit is of a soft character, compared with the shipments from Australia, consisting of apples and pears.

With respect to storage, we found, when inspecting...
inspect the mode adopted as regards
the apples from Australia, or rather, from America,
that small bottles were placed between each
pair of cases, this evidently being done with
the object of allowing a free current of air
to pass round the different layers, and
from what was said by the Officers of the
Board, it appeared that particular care had
to be taken in reference to the kind of
wood of which the bottles might be made,
no wood having a strong odour being admiss-
able. Again, in respect of cases, the
reference of the Chippewa Fruit exporters
has led them to use a particular clap
of wood, and their method, apparently, is
to wrap each apple in tissue paper, and
to lay the apples carefully one by one into
the cases. The object, of course, being to
prevent the bruising of the fruit. We
hope that these particulars may be of service
to Cape shippers.

Last week we hope to receive definitely
as to what steamers will be fitted out for the
conveyance of fruit. Though, as formerly stated.

C.G.

21/1/19

you may consider it fixed that the "Hawarden"

Castle," from Cape Town on 25th January will

be the first steamer.

We are, Dear Sirs,

Yours faithfully,

[Signature]

[Date]
The Molteno brothers

After studying at Cambridge, the Molteno brothers returned to South Africa and began breeding pigs in the Grabouw district. At the time, the Grabouw area was known as potato country, whilst pigs were mostly kept as a secondary enterprise. Unsatisfied with the prices that they received for their pork, the brothers decided to switch to large-scale fruit farming. They subsequently bought a group of farms called ‘Glen Elgin’ and thus became the pioneer fruit growers of the district.

It is rumoured that the Molteno brothers conceived the idea of growing fruit in Grabouw after a conversation that Harry Molteno had with their neighbour, Sir Anthony Viljoen. Sir Anthony apparently told Harry about the beautiful apple trees that his labourers were cultivating on his farm in their spare time. Shortly thereafter, the first apple trees were planted at Glen Elgin. They were also the first farmers in the area to start mixed-fruit farming. At the time of the first unsuccessful fruit export attempt by his father, Percy Molteno (1861-1937), was already conducting experiments with a number of types of fruit and gaining valuable knowledge concerning its export. An advocate by profession and married to the daughter of Sir Donald Currie, Percy influenced many shipping companies to install cooling-chambers on its vessels.

Within ten years, the Molteno brothers became the largest exporters of South African peaches and nectarines. During one season, Glen Elgin contributed twenty-five percent of all fruit exports and increased its turnover five times, boasting a quarter of a million pounds turnover. At the time, students from as far as California were sent to South Africa to learn the secrets of successful fruit farming from the Molteno brothers. Part of their success is attributed to the fact that, unlike the wineland farmers of their time, they gave fruit freely to their labourers. Workers were also encouraged to plant their own vegetable gardens and keep their own poultry. This practice was eventually adopted by all farmers in the district and exists to this day.

First success

The first successful consignment of fourteen cases of peaches from South Africa departed from Table Bay on Wednesday, 13 January 1892, aboard the Drummond Castle and arrived in England on 31 January. Cecil John Rhodes (1853-1902), the then Prime Minister of the Cape Colony, in the same year appointed a Select Parliamentary Committee on Fruit Culture and Fruit Export. Merriman, Minister of Agriculture in Rhodes’ Government, happened to be in England when the Drummond Castle arrived. Percy Molteno related this incident later in the Cape Times: “I remember mentioning to Mr. Merriman that a shipment had arrived, and invited him to accompany me to see the cases opened. This he readily did. With great delight, we saw case upon case opened up in splendid condition. The public sale of this fruit created a great sensation in the fruit world”.

In 1893 the Cape Times reports on the fruit warehouse of W.N. White & Co. in Stellenbosch: “The work of preparing the fruit for export does not commence till Monday, and of course the boxes are conveyed by the mail steamer on Wednesday. There are thus only two clear days and they are busy ones. About fifty girls are employed at the warehouse. On Tuesdays, at midnight, the boxes are put in the trucks at the crossing and run by rail to Cape Town, where the representative of the agency sees them duly in the ship. They reach Plymouth or Southampton, where Messrs White’s vans are waiting to convey them by road to the metropolis.”
Less than five percent of the shipment was damaged. The fruit was presented to the Minister of Colonies at a banquet on the eve of the opening of the British Parliament. Favourable press reports on this first shipment paved the way for fruit export from South Africa. In this period, about eight thousand packages of fruit were exported to the United Kingdom. Later in 1892, the Select Parliamentary Committee found that the best fruits for export were dark-coloured grapes with tough skins, peaches, apricots, plums, pears and apples. Indigenous Yellowwood from Knysna – which does not give off any odour – was at the time widely considered best for packaging.

**The Pickstone-Rhodes collaboration**

Harry Pickstone, who had arrived a few months earlier from California aboard the Grantully Castle and who was to become one of South Africa’s fruit pioneers, advised the Select Parliamentary Committee that more fruit should be grown. He advised that “farmers have to stop the childish system of odds and ends – here an apple – there a pear ” and that they should “do something on the commercial instead of the amateur scale. It is to be hoped that in a few years South African orchards will match those in California where output is reckoned by the number of tons exportable”.

After publishing a paper on the commercial prospects of fruit growing for export, he took every opportunity to explain the “brilliant prospects ahead” to farmers and was particularly struck by the local farmers’ “anxiety to learn as much as possible”. Pickstone managed to secure an interview with

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The *Drummond Castle* was built in Glasgow in 1881; she weighed three thousand seven hundred tons and was three hundred and sixty five feet long. Sadly, on the night of 16 June 1896, on the last night of her 18-day run from Cape Town to London, she encountered thick fog and was about five miles off course when she struck rocks between Ushant and Molene off the Brittany Coast of France and sank. A total of 243 passengers and crew members died.

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Cecil John Rhodes.
Prime Minister Rhodes and his enthusiasm and conviction convinced Rhodes to advance money for the establishment of South Africa’s first commercial fruit tree nursery. With the money he bought the farm Nooitgedacht and, in 1893, imported fifty thousand fruit trees of the best-known varieties from California.

Rhodes, after being forced to resign as Prime Minister in 1896, confirmed his belief in the potential of commercial fruit farming and export by purchasing twenty nine farms in the Franschhoek, Tulbagh and Wellington districts. These mainly wine farms were converted to fruit farms and became collectively known as the “Rhodes Fruit Farms” of which Harry Pickstone became the managing director. Approximately two hundred thousand trees were planted on these farms and established farmers feared a monopoly.

Rhodes’ entry however lent credence to a fledgling industry and prompted the steamship companies to increase their cold storage capacity in subsequent years. His last words before dying in 1902: “So little done, so much to do” are allegoric of the fruit export industry in his time.

Fruit pioneer Harry “H.E.V.” Pickstone.

Cecil John Rhodes, during a visit to Harry Pickstone at Lekkerwijn in 1899, calculated the potential profit of his fruit farms. He concluded that 110 000 trees, planted on 1 100 acres, would yield an annual nett profit of £15,500.

Author Rudyard Kipling and Harry Pickstone collaborated to design a trademark for Cape fruit. The “Dragon” is a cast of their final design.

Full-scale export

Full-scale export of fruit started in 1898 and, during that season, ten thousand eight hundred and seventeen cases of fruit were exported. The spurt of economic development pushed the South African shipping industry to new heights and encouraged the Railway Department to commission eighteen trucks — specially fitted for fruit transportation.
Until then, the mailship companies had operated fortnightly services; with additional ships employed to sail in the ‘off’ weeks. These became known as ‘intermediates’ and with the rise of the export of South African perishables, the lines also became more directly involved in the trade. In 1904, the first Trades Commissioner for the South African colonies was appointed in London. He promoted South African fruit and regularly reported on the quality of the fruit at international auctions. By 1908, export growers were given a list of reliable market agents in Britain to whom they could assuredly consign their fruit for sale.

The development of the industry was however relatively slow, as there were many technological problems to contend with. During those early years, the shipping companies managed the relatively small amounts of export fruit and the produce was mostly stored in the ‘basements’ of the ships. Producers also did not have sufficient knowledge of effective packaging and cooling methods. Each farmer packed and cooled his produce at his own discretion with variable results.

A farmer from Warmbaths clearly had a winning cooling method. On 6 July 1906, a number of producers from the Cape

Advice to potential emigrants in England (Field, 17 Aug, 1901): "At the College of Agriculture, situated in the Stellenbosch district, farming suitable to the country is taught, both practically and theoretically, at an annual cost of about £40 which includes board, lodging and class fees. Farms adapted for fruit purposes may run from £5 to £20 per acre".

Rudyard Kipling wrote this letter to Harry Pickstone, reporting on the condition of fruit that was exported to the U.K. in 1902.

and Transvaal colonies exhibited their goods at the Colonial Fruit Show in Vincent Square, London. This show was organised by the Royal Horticultural Society and included produce from eleven British colonies. The Transvaal Department of Agriculture won the gold medal and Mr J. McCord of Warmbaths was the only farmer to receive a special merit award for his *Transvaal Seedling* oranges.

**First Cold Storage terminal and first inspectors appointed**

The Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902), mostly waged outside the Cape Colony’s fruit producing areas, did not affect the industry too adversely and exports continued during the war. Shortly after the war’s termination, Table Bay became the first harbour in the world to boast a cold storage terminal specially designed for fruit. In the same year the Western Province Fruit Exporters’ Association (formed in 1899 and an early advocate of export quality control) appointed Mr R.J. Bulmer as part-time inspector for member producers.

The appointment was not popular with everyone and Mr John X. Merriman, under the impression that every box of fruit would be opened for inspection, said that the fruit might just as well be thrown into the sea. Mr Bulmer’s powers were however limited; he could inspect only the fruit of those exporters who requested the service, and in addition, fruit that was rejected for export could still be shipped. In 1906, the Cape Government appointed Mr Bulmer as its inspector and Mr A.C. Buller as assistant inspector. Both men were also fruit farmers and took turns to do inspections. As these men still had limited powers and could inspect fruit only at the loading point, some sub-standard fruit still reached the European markets.

John X. Merriman, Treasurer-General of the Cape Colony, was instrumental in the establishment of the industry.

A.C. Buller and R.J. Bulmer at a producer’s conference held in Stellenbosch, 1900.


**Shipping Rates**

In the pioneer era, export tariffs were flexible. Only citrus and deciduous fruit had fixed rates and even these could be adjusted without much effort. The reasoning was that perishable export was a young industry and not all producers could afford to pay the same rates. Tariffs were thus negotiated according to what each farmer could afford.

Competition amongst producers for shipping space was rife and, as more and more products became available, this system proved to be unproductive for the industry. Speciality products, which received high selling prices abroad, were more profitable to export and monopolised what little shipping space there was on the mailships. The liners obviously chose the highest bidders, leaving some export producers in the lurch.

As the volume of produce available for export increased rapidly in the late 1800s, the necessity for dedicated storage aboard ships became apparent. To cash in on the opportunity, many new shipping companies began trading from South Africa. These included Bullard, King & Co, John T Rennie, Clan Line and International Line. Entry of the newcomers resulted in a short, but heated tariff war, which proved very damaging to several of the parties. Not least of these was International Line who, impaired by imprudently low rates, had to approach Sir Donald Currie for aid.

**The Conference Lines**

To prevent a repetition of the damaging rate war, Sir Donald took the initiative and prepared a formal working arrangement. Initially, the mail lines worked out a joint policy on trade and a few months later, the agreement was broadened to include Clan Line and International Line.

This is generally accepted as the birth of the South African Shipping Conference. No details of the early conference are available, but, surprisingly, the agreement did not appear to
include rates. The conference, which was created to fight off competition, ironically found itself almost immediately faced by a depression that lasted for most of the first ten years of the 20th century.

The first test of conference unity came in 1895 when a new line, Cape & Natal Merchants Line, opposed the mail lines by offering direct voyages to Natal, calling only at Port Elizabeth. To counter the threat, the conference introduced a contentious deferred rebate on 2 March 1896. The rebate offered five percent (payable quarterly, six months after calculation) to merchants who shipped solely with the conference lines. Shippers were required to submit proof of their loyalty to the conference. It was clear that the profitability of the conference lines was vulnerable to attack as long as the conference did not include all the lines. Consequently, the conference was expanded to include the Cape & Natal Merchants Line as well as the British & Colonial Line.

The Union-Castle Shipping Company

The Union Steamship Company, founded by Arthur Anderson, started voyaging to South Africa in 1857 as a weekly mail service. The first ship used for trade between South Africa and Britain was the *Cambrian* in 1860.

By 1863, Sir Donald Currie had built up a fleet of four - one thousand two hundred ton - sailing ships. The ships all had ‘Castle’ names and traded around the Cape on the Liverpool-Calcutta route. With the completion of the Suez Canal in the 1870s, it was no longer necessary for traders to send their wares around the tip of Africa to and from India, and the Castle Line was effectively out of work. Relief came in 1872, when the Cape Colony government asked Sir Donald to provide competition for the Union Steamship Company. He complied, and the Castle Mail Packets Company was born.

In 1899, at the outset of the Anglo-Boer War, Sir Donald ordered his ship, the *Mashona*, to sail to South Africa, loaded with supplies from England. Instead of docking at Table Bay, as was the norm, the *Mashona* docked at Port Elizabeth. British authorities caught wind of the shipment and Currie — known to have good relations with the Boer Republics — was tried as a traitor. His defense was that he had not been aware of the fact that war had been declared when he had ordered the ship to sail from England and was subsequently acquitted.

Both Union Line and Castle Packet ships ferried vast numbers of British troops and supplies to South Africa. Before the war, the rivals had an amicable arrangement, alternating weekly mail runs and sharing trade opportunities equally. When their contracts with the Cape government expired in 1900, Sir Donald approached the Union Line’s board, suggesting a merger. The shareholders approved and in March 1900, the Union-Castle Shipping Company was registered. The war continued to provide heavy military traffic for the new Line until 1902, when peace was declared.

The Union-Castle Shipping Company in subsequent years became instrumental in perishable, diamond and gold exports from South Africa whilst also carrying goods from Europe to South Africa.

*Overleaf:* An exchange of letters in 1907 between Sir Thomas Fuller (Agent General for the Cape of Good Hope), Sir Donald Currie and the Line’s Cape Town Agency. These are typical of the amicable manner in which shipping rates were negotiated in those years.
COPY

No. A.M. 62/2305.

100, Victoria Street,
WESTMINSTER, S.W.
24th October, 1907.

Dear Sir Donald Currie,

I am much obliged for your letter of the 22nd instant, from which I was glad to learn that you had seen your way to adopt the proposal contained in my last letter.

I thank you for acceding to the rates suggested by Mr. Chiappini, which I have today cabled to Dr. Jameson.

Yours very truly,
(Sgd) Thos. E. Fuller.

COPY

100 Victoria Street,
WESTMINSTER, S.W. 30th October, 1907

Dear Sir Donald Currie,

I have today received a cable from the Prime Minister fully appreciating your kindness in reducing the fruit freights but expressing the earnest hope that the rate for Grapes will be still further reduced. He says there will be a large increase of shipments and he expresses the fear that the 55/G.

now proposed will not enable the shippers to get a profit on their venture.

If you could make the rate 50/G. I am sure it would be warmly appreciated. If you feel unable to do so I shall remain personally assured that you have done the best you could consistently with the interest of the Company.

I am,

Dear Sir Donald,

Yours sincerely,

(Sgd) Thos. E. Fuller
Dear Sirs,

**FRUIT EXPORT.**

Further to our letter by last mail, we now enclose copy of a letter from Sir Thomas Fuller, dated 24th ultimo, stating addressed to Sir Donald Currie/that the rates we had agreed to give for fruit shipments in the Cold Chambers had been communicated to the Cape Government; also we enclose copy of a further letter dated 30th ultimo from Sir Thomas Fuller to Sir Donald Currie submitting the earnest hope of the Cape Prime Minister that the rate for Grapes might be still further reduced, 50/- being suggested.

You will probably agree with us that the Cape Government can scarcely expect us to come down to this rate, and it is even a question whether it would be in the interest of the Cape fruit export to induce shipments of inferior fruit such as a low rate might encourage.

Yours faithfully,

[Signature]

Manager
Messrs The Union-Castle Mail Steamship Company, Limited
CAPE TOWN AGENCY

Dear Sirs,

FRUIT EXPORT.

We are obliged for your favor of 18th ulto and we note you have applied the rate of 65/ & 10% to Apricot shipments which have been made, but lest our letter of 1st November might not be sufficiently definite we considered it advisable to cable you that the rates as per our letter of 25th October were meant to be adopted, Sir Donald Currie having informed Sir Thomas Fuller that we must adhere to these rates, viz,

Peaches and Nectarines 65/ & 10%
Pears and Plums 60/ & 10%
Grapes and Sundrys 55/ & 10%.

The question of the rates from Natal, or whether any shipments can be made from Natal in the Cold Chambers, we mean shipments of Citrus fruits, is still open, and we are awaiting advices from Natal while perhaps you will be able to consult Mr Moltens on the subject, but it almost appears that it will scarcely be possible, according to figures
(2)

we have from Natal, for Citrus fruits, to bear the Cold Chamber rates, any reduction in which is we are afraid impracticable, in fact, as you are aware, we naturally consider that from Natal we should have higher rates.

We shall be interested to hear from you further.

We are, Dear Sirs,
Yours faithfully,
The Union-Castle Mail Steamship Company, Limited

Managers

COPY.

2nd. November, 1907.

Dear Sir Thomas Fuller,

I have read with interest your letter of 50th ulto. and naturally would like to do all that is possible to meet the wish of Dr. Jameson in regard to the rate for grapes referred to, or indeed any other matter.

I have thought over the rate proposed by Dr. Jameson and the matter has been considered by our Office in London. After careful thought we must adhere to the rates which I sent to you, and which were adopted to meet the wish of Mr. Chiappini.

I would have you consider whether it is in the interest of shippers themselves to encourage shipments of fruit other than of the first class, for probably the result would be an injury to the export of the better class of fruit sent by shippers who are acquainted with the conditions of packing and the market here.

Yours very truly,

(Signed) Donald Currie.
Before and after World War I

In 1910, the year of the establishment of the Union of the South African Colonies, Parliament passed a bill regulating the export of fruit. The *Uitvoer van Vruchten Wet* stipulated packaging sizes, determined that fruit had to conform to the characteristic shape of its variety, be void of stains and marks and individually wrapped in silk-paper. This act — the first of its kind in the world — laid the foundation for uniform quality and control of fruit for export. These stipulations were legally enforceable and elicited protest from many farmers who were not eager to conform. The government also soon found that they did not have enough inspectors at the harbours to regulate every consignment.

In 1910, P.R. Malleson writes: "It is a great mistake for the ordinary farmer to imagine that he is going to make money out of fruit simply because he has available land and sufficient money to buy and plant young trees. He must have the knowledge of how to get the best out of those trees and be prepared for plenty of hard work."

Peaches destined for export are now wrapped individually in silk paper. Delta, Groot Drakenstein, circa 1910.

Yorkshire’s Henry Scott & Sons relied on British sentiment to sell their 120 000 South African oranges.
During 1910, fruit exports reached approximately two hundred thousand packages. The United Kingdom was still the primary market, but consignments were also sent to Rotterdam, Amsterdam, Brussels, Antwerp, Hamburg, Berlin, Naples and Rome. The boom in export was a very positive development for the South African economy, but it was a sector of commerce that was underdeveloped and needed urgent expansion. Unfortunately, very little could be done about the situation because of World War I that began in 1914 and virtually halted trade until 1918. The British and Allied Forces relied heavily on the Union-Castle fleet during the war and the Line recorded heavy losses in both vessels and lives.

The weekly mail service was resumed after World War I and in 1921 the new Mailship *Arundel Castle* entered service. At nineteen thousand tons, she was the largest Union-Castle ship ever and hailed as “the perfection of shipbuilding”.

*The Arundel Castle*, launched in 1919, serviced the U.K. - Cape route from 1921 to 1958 with distinction.
The Vrugtebeurs

Fruit farmers addressed the problem of rival shipping companies and rate conflicts by founding the Vrugtekwekers Kooperatiewe Beurs van Suid-Afrika Beperk in 1922. It became generally known as the Vrugtebeurs. The object of this organisation was to stabilise the Union’s fruit export industry by organising appropriate shipping and distribution. During their first export season, the Vrugtebeurs was responsible for the co-ordinated export of more than one million packages of fruit. It was the first time that a million cartons were exported in one season.

The Union-Castle Shipping Company, which had joined the conference lines in 1900, was contracted to manage the distribution of fruit to the available ships.

The Vrugtebeurs was open to all fruit farmers, providing they paid a levy of five pounds per export ton of fruit. In 1924 this levy was extended to include all export fruit farmers and not only those who were members of the Vrugtebeurs. Obviously, the farmers who did not belong to the Vrugtebeurs were not happy with this arrangement, especially since the Union-Castle Shipping Company gave the members of the Vrugtebeurs precedence. Moreover, citrus farmers located in
Natal and Transvaal were not pleased with the Union-Castle Shipping Company, as they felt that the farmers from the Cape were being favoured. They charged that Cape farmers were being given space on ships that had superior cooling systems to those being allotted to them. Farmers were also forced to use Cape Town harbour for loading, even though Durban harbour was equally equipped and had been used for a number of years previously.

The period from 1922 to 1926 was a time of growing antagonism in the fruit export industry. Farmers were so dissatisfied with the Vrugtebeurs that they requested the Government to appoint a committee to investigate and study the practices regarding the export of fruit from South Africa. The government relented and in 1924 the Lategan Committee was appointed.

The Lategan Committee

The Lategan Committee was required to conduct a thorough investigation into the performance of the Vrugtebeurs. Primarily, the committee was to examine the relationship between the shipping committee of the Vrugtebeurs and the Union-Castle Shipping Company. They had to determine whether the Vrugtebeurs was acting in the best interests of all farmers, or whether some farmers were being discriminated against as a result of prejudice in favour of Cape farmers and members of the Vrugtebeurs. Moreover, the committee were asked to recommend changes that would improve producer satisfaction and also increase fruit exports.

In November 1924, the Lategan Committee submitted a report to the Government. Its recommendation was that a central authority be assembled. It would consist of three members of the Vrugtebeurs, one farmer who was not a member of the Vrugtebeurs and two technical advisors, one from the Department of Railways and Harbours and one from the Department of Agriculture. The authority had to act in the interests of all farmers and investigate any complaints. The authority would also negotiate shipping space for all export produce and would allocate shipping space to farmers on a first-come, first-served basis. These had to be strictly enforced while a representative of this authority also had to be appointed in Britain to ensure that only the best quality fruit was placed on the international market. The Union-Castle Shipping Company could no longer have a monopoly. All shipping companies had to be investigated while ships had to be screened so that only those with the best cooling systems were used for perishable exports. Farmers would have to supply the central authority with estimates on how much produce they intended to make available for export each season. Produce in future had to be screened – and only those of superior quality would be approved for export.
Initially, the report of the Lategan Committee was submitted to the Minister of Agriculture, General Kemp. However, he was not prepared to submit legislation for the creation of a central authority regarding fruit export. Disappointed farmers from the Transvaal then approached the Minister of Railways, Mr C.W. Malan, arguing that since export fruit was regularly transported to the harbours by train, he was competent to submit legislation regarding fruit export. Mr Malan agreed and submitted the Lategan-report to Parliament. Certain minor changes were made to the report and it was accepted as the *Vruchten Uitvoer Kontrole Wet No. 12 van 1925*.

Consequently, the *Vruchten Uitvoer Kontrole Raad*, as recommended by the Lategan Committee, was formed. The conception of this board did not invalidate the *Vrugtebeurs*, but merely regulated its actions. Mr J.C. le Roux was appointed as first Chairperson of the board. The first members were Major W.P. Anderson (Citrus Industry), Mr J.A. du Plessis (Citrus Industry), Mr A.C. Buller (Deciduous Industry), Mr J.A. du Preez (Deciduous Industry), Mr Roger Dyason (Growers not members of any industry), Mr George C. Hobson (Export officer) and Mr C.R. Oldendorf (Secretary).

Within its first month of existence, the *Vruchten Uitvoer Kontrole Raad* faced its first challenge. The board requested citrus farmers to supply them with estimates as to how much fruit would be available for export during each week of the 1925 season. Due to heavy rains in the Transvaal, navel oranges ripened about three weeks later than estimated and by July the board was faced with a hundred thousand cases more than the available ships could carry.

At the request of the *Vruchten Uitvoer Kontrole Raad*, the Vrugtebeurs chartered an additional cooling vessel, the *Roman Star*. This was the first time that a commercial ship had been chartered to transport excess fruit from South Africa. The project was beset with difficulties and heavily criticised.

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Mr J.C. le Roux, first chairperson of the PPECB. He served the PPECB with distinction until his retirement in March 1947.
Saga of the Roman Star

On arrival in Durban from Liverpool in August 1925, the Roman Star (built in 1895) evoked a storm of criticism concerning its age, size and speed. Mr H.A. Pare, the director of the Vrugtebeurs, bore the brunt of the criticism. He had to explain to disgruntled farmers why he had chartered a ship that was thirty years old and could only sail at a speed of ten knots. The farmers felt that the cargo tariff of sixty pounds per cubic ton was exorbitantly high for a ship of this standard. A group of farmers even approached the Minister of Agriculture to complain about - what they dubbed - “the Roman Star blunder”.

To aggravate matters, British sailors in Cape Town, from where the Roman Star was to sail, had just launched a strike action. Many ships, lacking sufficient crew, were stranded in Cape Town harbour. Mr Pare personally appealed to the crew of the Roman Star not to strike. He declared that if they did strike, all the fruit on board the ship would have to be buried and that the small-scale farmers, who were dependent on fruit exports for a living, would suffer considerable losses. The crew of the Roman Star agreed not to strike, on condition that they had the permission of their fellow sailors. The process of obtaining this permission took longer than expected.

The sailors in Cape Town decided that a conference, presided over by the Minister of Labour, was to be held with representatives from each ship. The representatives from the Roman Star stressed the urgency of their dilemma, and on 8 September the sailors held a vote to determine the fate of the Roman Star. After the crew of six of the seven ships in question had voted, it seemed as though most sailors were in favour of the Roman Star setting sail as soon as possible. However, before the crew of the final ship, the Sophocles, could cast their vote, a ship carrying maize left the harbour without permission. The striking sailors were furious and hundred and eighty of the hundred and eighty three crew members aboard the Sophocles voted against the Roman Star leaving. She was destined to remain in Cape Town harbour until the strike was over. Now desperate, Mr Pare went on board the Roman Star a second time to negotiate with the crew. Reluctantly they agreed to set sail, provided that Mr Pare took it upon himself to explain their position to the striking sailors after they had left. What exactly he offered them in return for setting sail was never made public, but it was alleged that quite a substantial amount of money was divided among them. A newspaper in Natal later reported that a penny for each case of fruit aboard the ship was awarded to the Roman Star’s crew as an incentive to depart without permission.

Shortly after five that same afternoon, a tugboat, the Ludwig Wiener, sailed past the Roman Star, appearing to be on its way to the docks. At the last moment it swung around, threw a cable onto the deck of the Roman Star and the ship was slowly led out of the harbour — to the shock and disgust of the striking sailors aboard other vessels. Finally underway, it was estimated that the ship would take twenty five days to reach London. However, the problems on board the Roman Star were not over. The ship could not even maintain a speed of ten knots and the expected time of arrival in London was now only the evening of 7 October. After calling on Las Palmas, near the end of its journey, there was an explosion in the Roman Star’s engine room and a number of crew members were injured. The captain was forced to redirect to Brest in France where the injured sailors could be treated and the damage to the ship repaired.

The Roman Star finally arrived at the King George V dock in London late on the night of 13 October 1925. The cargo could only be offloaded on the sixteenth, almost two months after it had been stacked onto the ship in Durban.
Inception of the PPECB
Towards the end of 1925, a growing number of farmers of perishable products other than fruit were making produce available for export. Shipping space that had previously been available exclusively to fruit was now being shared with meat, eggs, poultry, dairy and other products. Farmers who offered to pay higher rates to shipping companies were given prime shipping space and some felt that this was an unfair practice. Consequently, the Vruchten Uitvoer Kontrole Raad requested that its authority be extended to include export regulation of all perishable products. Parliament granted the request and in 1926 released the Wet op Reeling van Uitvoer van Bederfbare Produkte 53 van 1926. A provision was that all farming spheres had to be represented on a new board, leading to the creation of the Raad van Toesig op die Uitvoer van Bederfbare Produkte (Perishable Products Export Control Board or PPECB), to replace the Vruchten Uitvoer Kontrole Raad.

Adoption of the PPECB Act was however not without problems. The previous members of the Vruchten Uitvoer Kontrole Raad wanted to remain in control of the new board. They contended that they had experience in the field of export regulation and that the competence of the PPECB would be severely affected should new, inexperienced members be appointed. This was
Mr George C. Hobson, first Chief Executive of the PPECB. He served the Board from its inception until November 1945.

GEORGE CARY HOBSON was born in 1890, Graaff-Reinet district, where he attended school and later farmed. During the Anglo-Boer War, the Hobson family moved to Bechuanaland, where he and his brother, Samuel, often went hunting. Here they acquired a thorough knowledge and love of the veld that later was to form the background for their collaborative books. The two brothers made valuable contributions to Afrikaans literature and their book “Kees van die Kalahari” was in 1930 awarded the Hertzog prize for Literature. In 1914 he joined the scout corps and later the Transvaal Scottish Regiment. During World War I, George served in Europe and took part in the battle at Delville Wood. He was repeatedly wounded and exposed to poisonous gas, which led to a lung ailment that eventually caused his premature death. After returning from the war in 1919, George joined the Department of Agriculture and was transferred to Cape Town in 1924 where he became the PPECB’s first Chief Executive in 1926. During World War II, the Castle Line’s vessels were used as troop carriers and, as a result, perishable products destined for export were piling up at the harbours. George was instrumental in negotiating with ship captains for space and became well known amongst the shipping fraternity. After his death in 1945, a ship’s captain summed up the void left by his death: “As far as his work is concerned, everything is still in order at the docks. However, when we go ashore, we don’t go to the PPECB office anymore – the soul of the place is gone.”
strongly contested by the Minister of Agriculture and farmers of other perishable products.

The matter was debated in Parliament for more than two weeks. Eventually, after discussing the issue throughout the night until 05h35 on the morning of 1 June 1926, the two parties came to an agreement and the *Wet op Reëling van Uitvoer van Bederfbare Produkte* was promulgated by Parliament.

The agreement specified that the new board was to consist of two representatives each of citrus farmers, other fruit farmers, and egg and poultry farmers. The first chair of the PPECB was Mr J.C. le Roux. The new board was to preside over the export of all perishable products from the Union of South Africa. They had the authority to decide which shipping companies would be used for export and which perishable products would enjoy priority when assigning space aboard vessels.

**A Boom in Export**

By the late 1920s the amount of perishable products made available for export had increased significantly and shipping space aboard the contracted vessels proved insufficient. The PPECB was also investigating the possibilities of exporting to the United States of America, which, if proved viable, would aggravate the shipping space shortage.

The PPECB requested that all citrus farmers submit projections on quantities they intended to make available for export during the following ten seasons. The projections far exceeded the capacity of the ships that were utilised at the time. Besides citrus, it was presumed that the production of...
other perishable products would also multiply during the following seasons. It became clear that extra shipping space was an absolute necessity.

The new Board had no surplus funds and could therefore not sign charter agreements with shipping companies. They submitted a request to the Minister of Agriculture that, to accommodate the cost of chartering extra vessels, all export producers be charged an additional five pounds per ton of produce. The Minister refused, saying that the farmers would be in uproar if the existing levy of five pounds were doubled. The board was faced with tons of surplus fruit rotting in the harbours.

Fortunately, Mr Thomas Herold, manager of the Land Bank, was aware of the PPECB’s predicament and offered to loan them the money they needed, providing that the Department of Agriculture stood surety. The Minister agreed to this arrangement and the considerable amount of three thousand pounds was loaned to the board. The Land Bank also insisted that the PPECB establish a fund so that the board itself in future could stand surety for the money they wished to borrow.

Committee for the Investigation of Export Resources

On the Land Bank’s insistence, the PPECB appointed a committee, consisting of Messrs Le Roux, Dyason, Griffiths and Hobson, to investigate how the resources available to the board could be expanded to accommodate the growing industry. The committee reported regularly to the Minister of Agriculture, resulting in some drastic changes.

The first being that, as of November 1926, all producers of perishable products for export were obliged to register with the PPECB. This measure ensured that the board would always be aware of the estimated amounts of produce that would be exported each season. The cargo tariff of sixty pounds per cubic ton of produce was increased to seventy-four pounds per cubic ton. The selling price of deciduous fruit was fixed at nine pounds per ton and that of citrus fruit at eight pounds, ten pence per ton. Furthermore, the investigating committee requested that local committees be established at each of the ports from where perishable products were being exported. These ports were Cape Town, Durban, Port Elizabeth and East London. The aim of these local committees, as representatives of the PPECB, would be to ensure that produce for export was handled with the utmost care and discretion. They would have to ensure that the first-come, first-served principle for the allocation of shipping space be enforced and would have to oversee the deflection of produce from one port to another when necessary.

In July 1927, the committee suggested that the PPECB ask Government to allow the export of perishables, especially citrus fruit, through Lourenço Marques, Moçambique. This port was much closer to the Transvaal farmers and perishable

Underfloor air return ducts during construction at Table Bay harbour.

Two coal-engined Union-Castle ships, the Windsor Castle.
products would not have to be transported across such long distances. It was however not until March 1933, after lengthy negotiations with the Portuguese government, that an agreement was reached and citrus fruit (produced in the Transvaal) could be exported through Lourenço Marques. A representative of the board was posted in Moçambique to oversee handling and transportation of perishables.

Shipping Contracts Revised
The export industry had become a large and lucrative commerce sector and shipping companies within the South African conference competed eagerly for contracts with the PPECB.

Late in 1926, the Inter-Empire Fruit Transport Company approached the board with an offer. They proposed to provide refrigerated shipping space for approximately a hundred thousand cases of citrus fruit, eight times a year. They would also transport mixed shipments of fruit and meat during the months of February and March. The company guaranteed a minimum sailing speed of thirteen and a half knots and the offer was made conditional on the signing of a ten-year contract. In response to the proposal from Inter-Empire, the board created a concept agreement and also invited tenders from other shipping companies. The Committee for the Investigation of Export Resources was responsible for evaluating the tenders.

The assessment criteria were, firstly, that ships should have sufficient space to deal with the ever-increasing amounts of produce. Secondly, cooling spaces had to be suited to the delicate deciduous fruit that made up a large portion of the exports. Thirdly, that the ships should be able to maintain relatively brisk sailing speeds, and lastly, that the shipping companies had to quote reasonable rates as Britain had begun importing produce from other parts of the world, competition was stiff and selling prices could possibly drop.

The Committee approved the tenders of Mr Tildon Smith as well as the Union-Castle Company and it was up to the PPECB to decide which of these offers to accept. They entered negotiations with both parties and eventually, in January 1929, the proposition of the Union-Castle Company was accepted.

AGREEMENT
BETWEEN
The Government of the Union of South Africa, The Perishable Products Export Control Board, and
The Union-Castle Mail Steamship Company, Ltd.
Operative from 1st January, 1929.

Relative to the ocean conveyance of goods between the Union of South Africa and certain United Kingdom and Continental Ports.

The 1929 agreement also included non-perishable agricultural products.
Transformation in the Cooling of Perishable Products

Cooling had always been of paramount importance in the export of perishable products. Prior to 1925, fruit was subjected to unregulated storage temperatures at harbours and during transport. Spoilage had become rather costly and even when cooled; flawed systems led to huge losses.

In 1926, the PPECB's technical adviser, Mr E.A. Griffiths, took advantage of new refrigeration technology to design pre-cooling chambers for Cape Town harbour. A world first, these were built by the South African Railways and Harbours while the management was PPECB's responsibility. These rooms kept fruit at constant temperature before being loaded onto vessels.

Mr Griffiths, together with Mr G.C. Hobson, was also responsible for the development of the skid, a device that can...
rightfully claim to be the predecessor of the modern day pallet. The skid was a low platform on four sturdy steel wheels, onto which fruit was offloaded from trucks and then moved into the cooling chambers. From there, the skid was moved to the ships’ side and lifted on board by crane. Previously, individual fruit boxes were transferred by hand. The skid minimised the number of times that fruit was handled and greatly reduced deterioration.

Despite these advancements, the PPECB came under severe criticism in the same year. It rejected an entire shipment of plums because of deterioration that had occurred during transportation to the harbour. Farmers were of the opinion that they were losing money because the PPECB was not managing the inland transportation of perishable products. Consequently, the mandate of the PPECB was expanded to include research into cooling systems aboard trucks, trains, harbours and ships.

**Contaminated Eggs**

As it turned out, the committee had to begin their investigations immediately. The PPECB had just been made aware of nine hundred cases of eggs that had become contaminated whilst in storage at the harbour. After a lengthy investigation, the committee found that a few apples, which had been stored in the same refrigeration room as the eggs before, had been stolen and left in the ventilation tunnel. The fruit rotted and contaminated the eggs.
This was a significant discovery, as it altered the way in which perishable products were stored aboard ships. A British Government commission in 1925 had reported that certain perishable products were not compatible. They found that, when stored together, fruits of any kind accelerated the process of deterioration in other produce such as eggs, meat or butter. This confirmed the PPECB’s finding and it was clear that in future the storage of perishable products in refrigeration rooms had to be carefully regulated. The committee declared that incompatible products were not to be stored in the same space and should preferably be stored in different parts of the truck, train or vessel when being transported. This ruling vastly improved the quantity and quality of exported produce.

**Rotten Peaches**

No significant improvements in cooling systems were made until 1934, when the PPECB was again forced to examine the refrigeration of perishable products. During this year, two new pre-cooling chambers were built at Cape Town harbour. These refrigeration systems were more advanced than their predecessors and cooled fruit much more rapidly. At the time, the railway service was also upgraded and produce reached the harbour six hours sooner than before.

It was assumed that with these advancements, produce would reach its destination in an even better condition. This was not to be the case. The new cooling chambers were used primarily for peaches and the PPECB soon received numerous complaints that peaches were arriving in London in a dry and rotten condition. Initially, the Board passed the defects off as a seasonal phenomenon, however, during the following season, the process repeated itself and it became clear that something else was causing the deterioration. Peach farmers were justifiably worried that exports might cease altogether if a solution was not found soon.

**The Peach Commission**

In 1935, the Department of Agriculture, in co-operation with the PPECB, appointed a commission to investigate the problem. This commission consisted of Dr Franklin Kidd, Prof Rudolf Plank and Prof F.W. Allen, and became known as the “Peach Commission”.

During 1936, the commission reported to the PPECB that their research led them to believe that the shortened interval between harvesting and cooling, as well as the now rapid cooling of peaches, were the primary contributors to deterioration. Their recommendation was that, pending further research, peaches should be transported and cooled for the same duration and at the same temperature as they had been before 1934. These recommendations were mainly based on studies done by Mr Rees Davies, a technical adviser to the PPECB.

Peach farmers were upset, as their losses seemed to be the fault of the PPECB, who they claimed, had approved the new cooling systems.
refrigeration system without conducting proper research. The Molteno brothers instituted a claim for forty six thousand, seven hundred pounds for losses suffered. The claim was collectively against the PPECB, South African Railways and Harbours and the Department of Agriculture. After lengthy negotiations, the case was taken to the High Court, where the PPECB and the two government departments were acquitted. The Molteno brothers appealed, but lost again.

After these problems, the PPECB decided that a specialist in the field of refrigeration and cooling had to be consulted if the problem were going to be solved. They appealed for help to Dr A.J.M. Smith of the Cambridge Low Temperature Research Laboratory, and he agreed to come to South Africa.

Dr Smith, on arrival in South Africa in June 1937, immediately launched an experimental cooling program that led to immense change in the design and efficiency of pre-cooling chambers. PPECB’s existing pre-cooling facilities were also improved and became prototypes for future chambers. These advancements made South Africa a world leader in the pre-cooling of perishable products.
A very decorative display of South African oranges and grapefruit in London, circa 1939. Severe competition from other producer countries probably prompted this Outspan competition. Then still Sir Percy FitzPatrick’s Amanzi Estates trademark, it offered a Hillman car (valued at £169) as a weekly prize.
**Improving distribution**

In 1937, the PPECB co-ordinated an export expansion initiative to include a number of new ports around the world. Thirty six thousand seven hundred and sixty two cubic tons of fruit were shipped directly to Liverpool and Glasgow. This fruit would otherwise have been landed at Southampton and railed to the northern centres for distribution. Direct shipment of fruit to these ports expanded the export boundaries, lowered transport costs for producers and improved quality as it reduced the handling to which fruit packages were subjected.

South African exporters were also beginning to face severe competition from other countries exporting to the United Kingdom. Agreements between the Union of South Africa and some European governments created opportunities for trade, and expansion of this market became a priority for the PPECB. Currency-exchange problems, export prohibitions and trade restrictions were some of the complications that were encountered. Despite these, some fruit were shipped to Genoa, Marseilles, Dunkirk, Antwerp, Rotterdam, Bremen, Hamburg, Gothenburg and Stockholm. Experimental shipments of citrus fruit was also sent to Madagascar, Reunion, Mauritius, Ceylon, India, Siam, French Indo-China and African ports as far north as Casablanca and Alexandria.

Pre-cooling and cold storage accommodation in Table Bay proved insufficient for these additional exports and extra facilities became an urgent necessity. To meet the demand, the Railway and Harbour Administration constructed three new pre-cooling stores, the first of which was completed in time for the 1936/37 export season. The new stores expanded Table Bay’s pre-cooling and cold storage capacity by approximately six thousand cubic tons.

**Pre-Cooling Tunnels**

The most significant technical advancement that took place under Dr. Smith’s supervision was the development of pre-cooling tunnels. Over a two-year period, some forty units were built and tested before the system was perfected. Tunnels, equipped with rows of rolling skids were fitted into the existing cooling chambers. Cases of perishable products were placed in the tunnels and packed unevenly to minimize temperature loss. Cold air was then forced horizontally through the tunnel. These tunnels halved the pre-cooling time, virtually doubled the turnover of exports from South Africa and assured that produce arrived at destinations in better condition.

These considerable advances in pre-cooling technology prompted the Union-Castle Shipping Company to re-evaluate the available space and efficiency of cooling chambers aboard its vessels. The line decided to enlarge the capacity on its ships and contracted Dr Smith to design new cooling chambers for the entire fleet. His goal was to design a chamber that would maintain an optimum temperature throughout a voyage. He conducted several experiments and took thousands of temperature measurements on board the vessels. The resulting chambers were encased in a foil-like substance that aided cold air circulation inside the chamber while providing insulation from the warmer outside air.

**The Dual Temperature System**

Late in 1939, Dr Smith faced a dilemma regarding plums. During previous seasons, plums had regularly arrived in Britain in an unripe state and rarely ripened to perfection once there. After sending several experimental batches of plums to Britain under various conditions, Dr Smith concluded that plums that were transported at minus one degree Celsius and lower arrived in a satisfactory condition, but seldom ripened once there. When transported between one and twelve degrees Celsius, the plums showed signs of serious internal decay. Plums that were transported at thirteen degrees Celsius and higher arrived in an adequate, but slightly overripe state. Accordingly, Dr Smith suggested a dual temperature system for transporting plums: Fruit was pre-cooled at minus one degree Celsius and then transported at thirteen degrees Celsius. The results were promising as a high percentage of experimental loads arrived in Britain in near perfect condition.

These initial successes were achieved at the onset of the Second World War. During the war, experimentation ceased and the dual temperature system was not put into practice until after the war. During the war, Dr Smith aided the South African Government in the organisation of transportation, storage and distribution of the large amounts of perishable produce that the Government supplied to Allied Forces around the world.

Unfortunately, Dr Smith passed away in 1948. His death was a great loss to the development of refrigeration technology in South Africa and around the world. The dual temperature system was subsequently adopted for many other products and has advanced to the stage where, today, the temperature of perishable products is adjusted a number of times during transportation to ensure optimum quality on arrival.
World War II

The new war, as before, caused a sharp decline in commercial exports. Ships, previously used solely for exporting perishable products, were converted to troop carriers, conveyors of supplies and even as hospitalisation vessels by the allied forces.

The war did not, however, halt trade completely. The British government established a Department of Food, which supplied the allied troops with meals. A reasonable percentage of produce was bought from South African producers at reduced prices. Farmers, desperate to have their goods sold, sent high-quality produce to the harbours in the hope that British supply ships would be available to buy. Large amounts of choice goods piled up at the ports and created a nightmare for the PPECB. Mr George Hobson, the Chief Executive of the PPECB, worked from 1941 to 1945 without taking a single day off. He pleaded with the captains of every ship that docked at the South African harbours to find space aboard their vessels for perishable produce. He knew all the captains on the South African route personally, and they did all they could to help him. Despite Mr Hobson’s efforts, tons of high-quality produce decayed at the ports while waiting to be shipped.

The deterioration of the industry meant that not only the producers, but also the PPECB accrued large financial losses. From 1941 until the end of the war in 1945, industry bodies such as the Deciduous Fruit Board, the Citrus Board and the Dairy Control Board had to carry some of the losses sustained by the PPECB. In response, these industries began marketing more produce on the local market, which proved to be more lucrative than they had expected. Before the war, the South African market consumed only about ten percent of the country’s total perishable product output. During the war, this rose to almost fifty percent.

The end of the war early in 1945 did not mean the end of military service for shipping companies such as Union-Castle. They continued for some time to carry troops and civilians
home. It was only by mid-1945 that the lines – with what was left of their fleets – could return to normal duty and it took three more years to rebuild the industry.

Union-Castle suffered significant losses during World War II with thirteen ships lost to enemy action, stranding or fire. Union-Castle ships carried over a million troops and steamed nearly seven million nautical miles during the war. By the end of the war, its fleet was reduced to six vessels. Of these, the *Arundel Castle* was the first to be scrapped and undertook her final voyage in 1959 from Cape Town to London. The *Arundel Castle*’s bell was given to the PPECB and today holds a place of honour in the lobby of the Board’s offices in Plattekloof, Cape Town.

**Change of the guard at the PPECB**

In November 1945, the PPECB’s Chief Executive, Mr George Hobson passed away and was replaced by Mr W.J. Mathews. Less than eighteen months later, in March 1947, Mr J.C. le Roux resigned as Chairperson and was succeeded by Mr J.A. Gibson, the Secretary of Transport.

**Post-war developments**

Union-Castle not only replaced the special fruit carriers that were lost in the war, but also increased its pre-war fleet to seven refrigerated vessels. By 1948, export levels again matched those achieved in the pre-war era. However, South African nationalism was on the rise and Colonel Karl Roodt, managing director of South African Lines, applied for entry into the trade. Safmarine, a newly formed and rapidly growing South African company joined the request. Europe was impoverished after the war and Safmarine concentrated on the more lucrative United States market. The British-controlled conference lines were justifiably worried. If successful, the new entrants would have an advantage, as South African traders would undoubtedly favour South African shipping lines. Sir Vernon Thomson, director of the conference lines, suggested that the conference register a separate company in South Africa of which 49 percent shares should be offered to the two new lines and the South African public. The new company would automatically be accepted into the conference.

Mr Claude Sturrock of SA lines and Sir Arthur Harris of Safmarine considered the conference’s offer unattractive, as it guaranteed the ongoing monopoly of South African trade by international, mainly British, lines. The South African government also pressured the conference to accept the two South African companies. In addition, the government itself wanted to have more influence in the decision-making process of the conference.

Eventually, after negotiating the terms of the application for almost two years, the conference incorporated both South African Lines and Safmarine in 1950. In addition, the conference reluctantly agreed that they would not increase shipping rates without the approval of the South African government.
WILLIAM JOHN MATHEWS was born in 1900 and was educated at Rondebosch High School, Cape Town. He matriculated at the age of sixteen and shortly thereafter joined the South African Railways. In 1930 he was seconded to the Perishable Products Export Control Board. Bill supervised perishable exports at most of South Africa’s major ports and, rising from the ranks, was appointed General Manager of the PPECB in 1945.

After retiring from the service of the PPECB, he accepted the position of Shipping Consultant and Representative of the Citrus Exchange in Cape Town. Bill Mathews was well known in Cape Town’s cricket and rose-enthusiast circles – a passion he pursued until his death in 1989. Bill will be remembered for the tremendous advances that were made in pre-cooling techniques during his tenure and his successful navigation of the crisis arising from the great fire at Table Bay harbour.
Space and Freight Rates

In 1951, the conference lines asked the South African government for a fifteen percent increase in freight rates, but were offered only ten percent. Sir Vernon Thomson described the requested fifteen percent increase as ‘slight’, adding that the South African conference was the only major conference that had not yet increased its rates. He maintained that port congestion was increasing holding time of vessels and affected profitability severely. It was critical to the conference committee that rates should be increased.

No further increases were granted until 1954, when a meeting was called by the PPECB. Perishable produce exports were increasing progressively and exporters were beginning to experience space shortages. The lines, which had served South Africa with sufficient capacity for so long, saw this as their chance to have the rates debate reopened. Representatives of the conference, the South African Shipping Board and the PPECB attended the meeting.

Sir George Christopher of the conference made it clear that any increase in shipping space would depend on better rates. The PPECB proposed to withdraw its request for space and threatened to charter additional ships itself. The conference as well as the government rejected this in favour of further negotiations. These negotiations lasted for over a year as neither side was prepared to budge.
Eventually, in August 1955, the conference, government officials and the PPECB signed a new Ocean Freight Agreement in Pretoria. Despite the contracted negotiations leading to the agreement, the conference’s relationship with the PPECB had always been one of mutual trust. In fact, many agreements between the PPECB and the conference lines, including the Ocean Freight Agreement, have been agreed on a handshake.

The Ocean Freight Agreement stipulated that perishable products would be allowed to take up 12.5% of all shipping space at full tariff rates. Freight rates for perishable products were simultaneously raised by twenty five percent. Although the Ocean Freight Agreement held for about ten years, the rate conflict continued, and it was clear that a more effective system for determining rates would have to be instituted.

A fire destroys the Pre-Cooling Rooms at Table Bay harbour

On 29 January 1958, as the export season reached its peak, a devastating fire ravaged the majority of the pre-cooling chambers at Table Bay harbour. The fire started shortly after six o’clock and soon every available fire fighting team was on the scene. Two of the largest tugboats in the harbour also doused the flames from the docks. Despite all the water spewed onto the fire, a strong south-easter wind fanned the flames onto the highly flammable insulation material of the pre-cooling chambers located on B and C dockyards. From there, a storage shed also caught fire. The fire was rapidly spreading towards the engine room located between the B and C dockyards.

The PPECB’s Chief Supervisor, Mr W.J. Mathews, was on the scene soon after the fire started. Aware of the importance of the

The morning after. All that remained of the pre-cooling facilities were heaps of smouldering debris.
JACK A.E. GIBSON was born in 1901, and spent almost 40 years in the civil service. During this time he founded the National Transport Commission and was also Under-Secretary for the Interior. He served no fewer than five Cabinet Ministers before retiring in 1957. Whilst serving as the Secretary for Transport, he was appointed as the PPECB’s Chairperson, following Mr J.C. le Roux’s retirement on 31 March 1947. At the time, the Minister of Transport was of the opinion that a full-time Chairperson was no longer necessary, and Mr Gibson was appointed as ordinary member of the Board, designated Acting Chairperson. Due to this, the Board resolved to merge the office of the Board and that of the Chief Supervisor.

Jack Gibson in his day was a popular radio singer and few realised that the man with the beautiful voice on the SABC was also a senior civil servant. Mr Gibson passed away aged 85, in Somerset West, 1986.
The Clan Macaulay being loaded with produce that survived the fire.
engine room, he appealed to the head of the fire brigade to concentrate their efforts there. However, by this time, a large amount of fire hoses had already been laid out across the dock and some had become entangled. By the time that the fire fighters had managed to disentangle some, the flames had already burst through the back wall of the room. Some hoses were placed inside the room – drenching everything continuously. Hours later, flames still surrounded the entire engine room, but the room itself survived the blaze. By evening, the fire had destroyed all the other buildings on B and C dockyards. The pre-cooling chambers on A dockyard survived the blaze, but there were to be no pre-cooling facilities at the harbour until the electrical connections and water pipes to the engine room had been repaired. The fire was a devastating blow to the industry. A committee consisting of senior officials of the PPECB, the Deciduous Fruit Board and South African Railways and Harbours was established to co-ordinate emergency measures.

Dealing with the disaster
One of the first steps taken by the committee was to deal with fruit that was already at the harbour for cooling and export. The vessel Clan Macaulay had just arrived in port and was requested to receive a consignment of grapes. Fortunately, the Clan Macaulay had reserve refrigeration capacity and complied. However, because the cooling chambers on the ship were not quite as effective as pre-cooling chambers, great care had to be taken to prevent deterioration of the produce. The grapes were loaded onto the ship at night. Timber dunnage was packed between every layer to ensure effective ventilation. Cooling chambers aboard the Clan Macaulay were sealed before sunrise, and the fans worked at maximum capacity until sunset when loading could resume.

Construction of the new pre-cooling facility started shortly after the fire.
in a satisfactory condition when they reached Britain, and no complaints were received. This is just one of many examples of how the shipping industry went out of its way to assist the perishable export industry at a time of crisis.

Shortly after the departure of the Clan Macaulay, refrigeration was restored to the chambers at A dockyard. For the rest of the 1958 season, daily shipments of produce were loaded there for export. The Deciduous Fruit Board also rented refrigeration rooms from the Imperial Cold Storage and Supply Company and the Table Bay Cold Storage Company for temporary storage of plums, grapes and pears.

It was decided that Bon Chretien pears would not be exported during this season and that the majority of apples destined for export through Table Bay harbour would be routed through Port Elizabeth harbour instead. For this purpose, the South African Railway Services provided an express train to transport produce to Port Elizabeth where harbour staff had to work overtime to accommodate the extra produce.

Meanwhile, astonishing progress was made in rubble removal from the destroyed B and C dockyards at Table Bay harbour. Bulldozers worked day and night and once B dockyard had been sufficiently cleared, a shed made of galvanised zinc was erected. It housed twenty-six pre-cooling tunnels with a capacity of one thousand two hundred cubic tons, the largest in the country. No more than eight weeks after the fire, the first perishable products were stored in these cooling chambers.

A new pre-cooling facility was being built on D dockyard when the fire broke out. This facility was originally designed to have a capacity of two thousand five hundred cubic tons. However, after the blaze, the emergency committee requested that the capacity be increased to seven thousand eight hundred cubic tons. The building company agreed, doubled their labour’s working hours and completed the project in February 1959, a full year earlier than the original deadline. Export of perishable produce from Cape Town could now finally resume as before.

By February 1961, pre-cooling facilities at Table Bay harbour had been completely renovated and boasted more than double its original capacity. Despite the devastating fire, the export of produce during the 1958 season exceeded the previous by two hundred and thirty one tons - a tribute to everyone involved during this trying time.
Mr D.J. Joubert, third Chairperson of the PPECB. He served the PPECB from 1957 to 1983.

DANIEL JACOBUS JOUBERT was born at Dundee in 1909, where he also attended school. He continued his education at Stellenbosch University where he obtained a law degree. He practiced as Advocate for a time before joining the Civil Service. Danie soon became a prominent member in various Transportation boards and committees, eventually being appointed as Secretary of Transport. While in this capacity, he was nominated to succeed Mr Jack Gibson as the PPECB’s Chairperson.

Danie Joubert was a well-known Springbuck athlete and held the world record (9.4 seconds) for the 100-yard sprint for many years. He also represented South Africa at the 1932 Olympic Games in Los Angeles.
Mr C.C. Meaker, the PPECB's third Chief Executive. Appointed in 1960, he held the position for twenty four years.

CLIFF MEAKER was born and grew up at Somerset East, Eastern Cape. He studied at the University of Stellenbosch and served the PPECB for almost thirty years. During his tenure at the PPECB, he became internationally known as an expert on perishable product transportation and won many friends for the South African industry. Cliff retired in February 1984 and sadly passed away in October of that year.
Certification of Refrigerated Road Motor Transport (RRMT)

In the late 1950s, refrigerated road motor transport began making an impact into the perishable produce industry and took over from rail as the “preferred” mode for transporting perishables from inland. While refrigerated vehicles have the refrigeration capacity to maintain desired product temperatures during transit, they lack enough air circulation through and around tight loads to absorb all sources of heat. At best, the temperature can be kept constant. Therefore, it became of great importance that farmers accurately control the temperatures of produce before road transportation.

Road transport is the only part of the export cold-chain that is not regulated and certified by the PPECB. This has caused quite a few problems for the industry, as not all trucking companies keep satisfactory standards. Producers however began to insist that trucking companies be certified by the PPECB before making use of their services.

Avocado Pear confusion

Over the years, the PPECB frequently requested the Conference lines for a special reduced rate when the export potential of a product was researched. These “new” products were obviously not on the Conference’s freight tariff list and a “normal” rate was introduced only as volumes increased. Examples of such produce have been mangoes and certain vegetable types. At the time, experimental consignments of avocado pears were being exported.

Avocados pears are mostly cultivated in the Tzaneen and Nelspruit areas and are transported to Cape Town in
refrigerated trucks – a journey that takes approximately thirty-six hours. Avocado pears have a twenty-nine day window from harvesting to market, during which time the avocados have to be sorted, packed, graded, inspected, transported to the docks, stored until shipping space becomes available, shipped to its destination and sold on the market.

Pre-cooling staff at Table Bay harbour were, at the time, responsible for setting the storage temperatures of the products at the docks and in general, are familiar with the optimum temperature storage ranges of all products. However, when avocado pears first arrived at the harbour for export, the staff were not sure what they were. Being used to deciduous fruit, they wrongly deduced that the avocado was a new class of pear and therefore set the temperature to minus half-degree Celsius. Avocados have to be stored at four and a half degrees Celsius and the mistake ruined many avocados that were destined for export. Consequently, the PPECB stopped referring to avocados as avocado pears, but rather as avos, to prevent further misunderstandings.

The South African Avocado Growers Association (SAAGA) and the PPECB in subsequent years became world leaders in the science of optimum temperature control and effective transportation of avocados.

Malodorous Fruit

In 1961, a number of complaints were received regarding strange-smelling fruit. Some consumers reported fruit that smelled of paint, some of diesel oil and some reported fruit that smelled of herbs. Since it was practically impossible to eliminate these odours in the hulls of ships, the PPECB conducted a number of experiments to ascertain whether paint, oil or herbaceous fumes adversely affected the quality of export fruits. Testing was conducted using grapes, apples, peaches and apricots, stored at minus one degree Celsius. Technicians deduced from these tests that the Buchu herb, which was often stored with fruit on board ships, did not affect the quality of fruit. Its effect on the scent of the fruit was so insignificant that storage of Buchu in the same shipping space as fruit was not prohibited. However, fruit that had been exposed to paint and diesel oil fumes were virtually inedible. Small amounts of diesel oil did not adversely affect the quality of fruit, but when amounts exceeded 0.03% of the storage space, it rendered the fruit inedible. They also concluded that newly painted hulls were not to be used for the storage of fruit before the smell of the paint had dissipated, whilst hulls covered with aluminium paint were completely ruled out for storing export fruit.

More produce for export

The 1960s saw an escalation of perishable produce available for export, with particular growth in the fresh marine produce sector. Before, most of the exported seafood was salted and cured. However, in the early sixties, long-term freezing of seafood developed to the extent that large quantities of uncured seafood could be exported.

In 1962, the PPECB appointed a planning committee, tasked to determine how the industry would deal with expansion. Mr H.R. Moffatt, the technical advisor of the Railway Administration, was appointed as the convener and chair of the committee. The committee members were from the PPECB, the Deciduous Fruit Board, the Citrus Board and the Directorate of Agricultural Product Standards. The main challenges facing the committee were labour and equipment shortages.
By May 1963, the planning committee submitted a report to the Board that contained a number of recommendations. Accordingly, the Board made extensive modifications to the pre-cooling tunnels at Cape Town and Port Elizabeth harbours. A new pre-cooling store was also built at the Cape Town harbour. Experiments were conducted in which produce was pre-cooled for shorter periods than usual. This did not seem to have any adverse effect on the quality of the products, and was consequently instituted for all produce. The quantity of produce that could be accommodated in the pre-cooling rooms was thus increased. In addition, a number of trains were modified to carry skids. Offloading produce from trains now took half the normal time and required less labour.

During the 1964/65 season the PPECB implemented more of the recommendations made by the planning committee. The board appealed to the various industries to stagger the arrival of produce at harbours in order that additional produce could be packed on the so-called quiet days, Sundays and Mondays. This enabled more efficient handling of produce on the busier days. In addition, night packing was instituted at the Cape Town harbour — effectively doubling the amount of produce that could be accommodated.

During 1968, tests were carried out to determine optimum storage conditions for orchids. It was found that orchids stored at eight degrees Celsius, along with a small percentage ethylene gas, were still in an outstanding condition even after ten days. This paved the way for experimental exports that were to be undertaken in 1969.

The first 'Cargo-Only' Mailship

In October 1964, the Southampton Castle is launched. It is the first mailship built exclusively for the transport of cargo between Southampton and South African ports. The ship was lauded for her revolutionary design. It boasted thirteen tanks for carrying Cape wines and fruit juices. Her hull was insulated and designed to accommodate fruit, but space could be re-arranged to give flexibility when handling other perishables that required frozen or chilled storage. The Southampton Castle was one of the very first vessels designed to accommodate containers, which were to transform shipping in subsequent years.

On August 22 1966, Mr D. Joubert, Chairperson of the PPECB, the Minister of Finance, Mr N. Diederichs and Mr J.S. Bevan, the representative of the conference, signed a new Ocean Freight Agreement.
First steps towards Containerisation

Containerisation changed the entire export chain from a complex system of loading and unloading, pre-cooling and re-cooling, to a door-to-door service. The transition from break bulk to container shipping was to be a mammoth undertaking, as it required changes in all sectors of the export industry.

The drive to containerisation gained momentum when the government appointed a working committee, under chair of Prof W.F.J. Steenkamp, to investigate new transport techniques. The committee members were Mr H.G. Bosch (then recently retired from the SAR), Mr Desmond Lawrence of the Conference, Mr C.M. Muller of the Department of Commerce and Mr John Bester of the PPECB. This group became known as the Steenkamp Committee.

Mr John Bester was appointed to the PPECB in 1960 as Technical Advisor for refrigeration. John became well known in the refrigerated shipping world and even served as Vice-President of the International Institute of Refrigeration in Paris, France. During his tenure, no new refrigerated ship would be built anywhere in the world without his approval of the plans. Together with Mr Lossie Ginsberg and Dr Guido Dreosti, Mr Bester did invaluable research on the storage and transportation conditions of various perishable products, later

In 1973, Safmarine took over South African Line and, by the mid 1970s, the Union-Castle line.
to be adopted by many countries around the world. He retired from the PPECB in 1986 but continued as consultant until 1993.

Following a fact-finding mission to Australia, the Steenkamp Committee recommended that containerisation should be introduced for some South African trades.

Meanwhile, in June 1969, the Conference Lines took the first step towards containerisation. It appointed a committee responsible for the initial implementation of containerisation on conference vessels. This group became known as the Swan Committee — after the pub in which they met — and later produced the so-called Swan Report.

The Swan Report amply illustrated the need for a new shipping system, noting that South African canned fruit shippers, who mainly exported to the United Kingdom, were planning to increase exports to two hundred and thirty thousand tons per year. The conference calculated that in order to accommodate this, they would need thirteen thousand TEUs. Assuming that a sailing programme could be put into practice which allowed for 100 voyages per year, it would mean that every ship would be required to load 130 TEUs of canned fruit. This was impossible for the conventional brake bulk fleet. Consequently, the conference decided to effect containerisation changes aboard some of their vessels.

By 1972, before the conference could put its containerisation plans into practice, they faced fresh opposition from Enterprise Container Lines (ECL) which was already utilising containers in what were called cellular ships. Although offering appealing rates, ECL frequently suffered scheduling problems as delays in the bulk cargo handling upset their schedules. In response the conference lines brought Overseas Containers Ltd as advisors into their discussions in order to expedite their entry into cellular shipping.

The PPECB meanwhile introduced mandatory banker's guarantees that indemnified the Board from contingent liability of ‘dead freight’ claims by shipping companies. These claims were made when space, booked by the PPECB on behalf of exporters, was not occupied. By the end of 1972, the Board was in possession of banker's guarantees from ninety-eight exporters. In addition, statutory organisations such as the various industry control boards, furnished the PPECB with blanket-guarantees covering all their export commitments.

Towards the end of 1973, the conference offered government an implementation plan. The lines set up a series of work teams, tasked to build up the container service infrastructure. These teams in 1976 became the Southern Africa Europe Container Service (SAECS), of which Safmarine — who had by then also taken over Union-Castle — owned forty one percent shares.
The Southern Africa Europe Container Service (SAECS)

Mr A.F. Murray Johnson was appointed as first chief executive of SAECS. An executive planning board was formed to look into ship design, terminals, ship programming, public relations, backup service, integration of services, accounting procedures, data processing, cargo flows, inland container logistics as well as inland and sea tariffs.

SAECS’ original plans called for ten ships with capacities of two thousand four hundred and fifty TEUs for the Britain and northwest European service, and four ships with capacities of one thousand three hundred TEUs for the Mediterranean service. The initial marketing was contracted to Safmarine and Ellerman & Bucknall.

The official opening of the conference’s container service was 1 July 1977. The ceremony — presided over by the Minister of Transport, Mr Ben Schoeman — was held at Table Bay harbour. It was very much a Conference Lines parade and members of the conference named the occasion “C-Day”, hailing it as the beginning of containerisation in South Africa. ECL, who had been operating cellular ships for almost five years was, according to a *SA Shipping News* article, not invited to the event.

The first specially built cellular ship to call at South African container ports was Lloyd Triestino’s Africa, which had a capacity of one thousand, three hundred and nine TEUs and arrived towards the end of July 1977. The first conference cellular vessel to offer the new service was the two thousand, four hundred and fifty TEU Table Bay that arrived during December 1977.

Porthole Containers

The shift from shipping cargo in fully refrigerated ships to container ships started with porthole containers. Because perishable produce is so sensitive to temperature changes, it is important that each product be cooled exactly according to its own scientifically determined temperature. Porthole containers were all plugged into a single temperature regulation source that made it impossible to regulate containers individually. In addition to these shortcomings, porthole containers had to be carefully packed to achieve...
perfect balance – a time consuming and labour intensive task. It was clear that container technology had to be improved.

Conflict with the SA Transport Services
In the mid 1970s, construction of a new porthole container store at Table Bay harbour created a conflict between the PPECB and the South African Transport Services. The Department insisted that the PPECB should be held liable for the almost 1,5 million rand construction cost. From 1976 onward the PPECB appealed the matter to Government, but was largely ignored. In 1982, the PPECB was billed for the full amount and a heated exchange of letters with the Department followed. The PPECB also appealed to the Jacobs Commission who, appointed by Government to investigate problems in the deciduous fruit industry, recommended that the PPECB should not be held liable.

Dr S.J.J. van Rensburg (then still an ordinary member of the PPECB board), with the help of the Deciduous Fruit Board, made further appeals to the Department of Agriculture. Eventually, the South African Transport Services were forced to back down on the matter and the PPECB was no longer held liable.

Integral Containers
The subsequent advancement in cellular shipping was the development of integral containers. Each container has its own cooling equipment and products with similar temperature requirements could now be loaded into the same container. The efficiency of the integral containers ensured that products could now be loaded, cooled, regulated and transported from the packhouse directly to destinations abroad. Producers and even small-scale exporters were suddenly selling more – and received better prices. South African produce of superior quality was now reaching international markets and did much to improve the industry’s reputation.

By 1977, the Conference lines, after investing one thousand four hundred million rand altogether into containerisation, were up against severe competition from other shipping lines. The degree of competition caused the conference serious financial problems even before shipping their first container.
Because integral containers are more expensive, their incorporation into the industry was relatively slow and destined to reach critical mass only towards the end of the century.

**Fires at Port Elizabeth and Table Bay**

A fire destroyed fifteen pre-cooling tunnels on 3 May 1975, this time at Port Elizabeth harbour. The PPECB offered recommendations to South African Railways and Harbours on how to improve the tunnels and the equipment that was lost. These included sandblasting of the tunnel walls and a new floor. Two years later, on 11 October 1977, another fire destroyed thirteen pre-cooling tunnels on A berth at Table Bay harbour. Again, the rebuilding of the tunnels was seen as an opportunity to improve on its design. As far as possible, steel structures were used instead of the traditional wooden structures while the thermal insulation of the tunnels was also improved.

**Annual rate negotiations**

The rate negotiation system was reviewed only in 1977. At the time, only the old Union-Castle mail ships, now sailing under the Safmarine flag, were available to transport perishables from South Africa to Europe. Because exporters knew about the shipping space shortage, they began to apply for more space than they needed, in the hope that they would get enough when space was allocated.

In response, the Government decided that the Conference no longer needed its express approval for rate adjustments. The government’s views, however, had to be taken into consideration at the annual reviews. With the move to containerisation, and the subsequent financial risk, the lines became more forthcoming when negotiating with the PPECB. However, the annual freight negotiations between the PPECB and the Conference shipping lines could be a lengthy process. It normally consisted of three sessions, one for deciduous fruit, one for citrus fruit and one for other perishables. Factors that affected rate changes were, amongst others, the volatile fuel prices and fluctuations in foreign exchange.

The method of negotiation resembled horse-trading and often became deadlocked. Supply and demand however dictated, and sometimes the shipping lines had the upper hand. Regardless, the PPECB representatives, and particularly Dr Fanie van Rensburg, bargained ardently on behalf of the exporters.

Efficiency increased when break-bulk cargo handling (top) was replaced by pallets (bottom) in the mid 1970s.
Despite the fierce negotiations, there was never any bad blood between the Board and the Conference and they always reached a favourable compromise. In fact, the negotiations, which were generally held at the end of the year, were typically followed by a closing function to which the spouses of all involved were invited. These functions were customarily held at Dr van Rensburg’s farm, Otto’s Bluff, near Pietermaritzburg or at his holiday home in Ballito Bay. Dr van Rensburg, an acclaimed Brahman stud farmer, made sure that the function was always a culinary feast. The customary braai would be loaded with red meat lover delights such as steaks, chops, boerewors, and skilpadjies. In addition, Ms Rénee van Rensburg would prepare numerous side dishes and desserts.

On one occasion, the marine industry proposed that the year-end function should be a fish braai instead of the customary red meat banquet. They provided snoek, sole, abalone, calamari, steenbras, prawns, lobster, yellowtail and almost every other type of seafood that was available in South Africa. They invited Mr Louis Fourie, General Manager of I&J’s fish processing factory and a renowned seafood chef, to do the cooking. The response to the braai was overwhelmingly positive and Dr van Rensburg lauded the marine industry for its offering. He did, however, prepare a few steaks in addition to the seafood!

**Instability in the late seventies**

During 1979, the PPECB’s chairperson, Mr D.J. Joubert, identified a number of factors that affected the shipping industry and, by implication, also the PPECB. Shipping costs were rising because a large number of new reefer vessels were being built to clear the disparity between export producer demands and available shipping space. To aggravate matters, political upheavals in Iran resulted in a severe oil shortage around the world. The price of bunker fuel rose steeply, and, consequently, also shipping tariffs. These factors resulted in a highly unstable shipping market and sudden fluctuations in tariffs. It became essential for the PPECB to negotiate special rates for marginal products to prevent its export termination.
Sanctions and Rocketing Costs

By 1981, there were widespread economic sanctions against South Africa. These sanctions inevitably affected trade and freight rates increased by seven and a half percent. Another seven and a half percent increase occurred in 1983 while double-digit inflation contributed to making South African exports increasingly unattractive to foreign buyers.

The PPECB, the shipping companies and producers made a valiant effort to promote the export of South African perishables despite these drawbacks. During the first half of the twentieth century the marketing of products was geared exclusively towards the producers, whilst the consumer was hardly considered. However, this changed when chain stores such as Marks & Spencer in the United Kingdom began retailing products from South Africa. These stores provided a lucrative and stable market, but in turn dictated what types of products they wished to receive. Trade in perishable produce thus became consumer-driven and demand very fickle. Moreover, the conference lines exercised “pruning” measures whereby perishable produce rate classes were reduced to forty. They also introduced commodity box rates (CBRs) that covered sixty commodities.

During 1983, the Board responded to developments by becoming more commercialised. The Board of Directors, who represented the various export industries, took all policy decisions. The producers also adapted remarkably well to changing market demands. Considerable effort, time and expense were involved in changing the variety, size and sometimes even the type of goods they produced. In most cases this meant re-planting complete crops or changing their entire method of farming.

New Legislation

By 1983, the legislation under which the PPECB operated had become superfluous and somewhat outdated. The Minister of Transport requested a re-evaluation of the legal duties of the board and after an extensive investigation conducted by the Commission for Administration, it was ruled that the PPECB
should become a statutory body. New legislation was created to streamline the regulation of the export of perishable produce from South Africa and also ensured that the Board could operate with minimum interference from Government. Becoming statutory under Act number 9 of 1983, the Act recalled all previous legislation since 1926.

During 1984, when the legislation was promulgated, the Minister appointed ten new members to the Board. Six of these were representatives of the largest export industries, as calculated by the average yearly export quantities of each industry over a five year period. Additionally, one representative was appointed for each industry that constituted more than twenty percent of the total annual perishable export. One more person was nominated by the Agricultural Union to represent smaller industries not otherwise represented. The last member represented the Minister.

**New Offices for the PPECB**

Since the inception of the PPECB in 1926, the offices of the Board were situated at the Cape Town harbour. In 1984, however, the South African Transportation Services, who owned the premises, increased the rent by a significant amount. The PPECB consequently decided to look for alternative office space.

After a lengthy search, a building in the Cape Town central business district was chosen as the PPECB’s new address. A lease agreement for five years was signed and the move from the docks to the new offices, took place at the end of March 1984.
Air transportation “lifts off”
In the mid-1980s, air transportation of perishable produce became viable, but only for some produce groups. Because airfreight is very expensive, this mode of transport is only feasible for high value export produce such as flowers, exotic fruits and vegetables – destined for niche markets. An exception is grapes from the lower Orange River region, which fetch high prices during the early part of the season. Specially chartered aircraft are used to transport the grapes from Upington to Europe. For a while, even South African Airways offered a service for this purpose, but this proved to be too costly and was suspended.

Due to a lack of large cooling facilities at South African airports, it is not always possible to store products under refrigerated conditions. It is, however, essential that the products are treated with the utmost care while thorough planning and management of product movement is essential. Preference for the available cold storage is given to products such as live crayfish and other fresh marine products, flowers, berries and other exotic fruits or vegetables. However, most products are flown out shortly after arrival at the airport and do not necessarily have to be kept in cold storage. Under certain circumstances, most damage occurs when products are transferred in and out of cooled conditions, effecting condensation that can lead to mould growth and decay.

Every effort is however made to maintain product temperature during transportation to the airport, at the airport, during-and after the flight. Specially insulated unit loading devices (ULD’s), special cargo protection (mobile insulated or refrigerated units) or insulating materials (e.g. space blankets) are employed to protect the produce from temperature fluctuation.

All perishable produce, including flowers, are inspected at airport cold stores.

Temperature management is critical when utilising air transportation for high-value perishable produce.
S.J.J. VAN RENSBURG was born in 1923 at Carolina in Mpumalanga. After school, he worked as a pump attendant at the Waterberg co-operative. An ardent sportsman, he represented Free State on the rugby field and was a capable boxer. His hard work and determination were also noticed and he made rapid progress in the business world. In 1956, at the age of 33, he was appointed as General Manager of Vleissentraal. He represented the Meat industry on the PPECB board from 1959 and was elected Chairperson in 1984.

Dr van Rensburg served as director of some sixty different companies, in many cases as chairperson. A dignified and formidable orator, Dr van Rensburg also was a resourceful businessman and farmer, while his ability to remember names and detail was legendary. In 1987 he received an honorary doctor’s degree from Potchefstroom University for his lifetime contribution to agriculture. Dr van Rensburg remained the PPECB’s chairperson until his retirement in 2000. He served the PPECB and industries on the board for almost forty one years. Oom Fanie enjoys his retirement in Pretoria, where he lives with his wife Rénee.
DAVID SCHREUDER was born and grew up in Johannesburg. After matriculating, he joined the South African Defence Force where he obtained a B. Mil (B.A.) Degree in 1970. After a short period at the Industrial Development Corporation, he transferred to Bremer Mills, where he became Group Manager in 1977. On 1 July 1978 he joined the PPECB as Assistant General Manager, and acquired an MBA degree (Cum Laude) from the University of Stellenbosch in 1982. He was appointed as General Manager in 1984 when Mr Cliff Meaker retired.

During his career at the Board he displayed strong and inspired leadership in all projects and tasks that he undertook, and was instrumental in the Board’s decision to build its own Head Office building. Exactly 18 years after starting his career at the PPECB, he suffered a fatal heart attack during a meeting at the PPECB. Dave’s unexpected death was a shock to everyone who had the pleasure to know – and work – with him.
The PPECB assists the SADF
In 1986, the South African Defence Force Catering Corps approached the PPECB for assistance. They were concerned about the quality of the fruits and vegetables that were supplied to the troops. They admitted that the Defence Force, for lack of better-suited transport, used cattle trucks for fresh produce distribution. The PPECB made a lengthy recommendation and strongly advised against transportation of fresh produce in cattle trucks. The recommendation was that the Catering Corps make use of refrigerated transport instead. Although the Defence Force was concerned about the costs, the PPECB proved that the waste reduction would more than make up for money spent on proper transport.

A new Head Office building
When the PPECB began to outgrow its offices in Cape Town centre in 1987, the option to acquire its own property became a possibility. The issue was hotly debated and raised questions regarding the future of the PPECB. Some board members were reluctant to purchase property before they had established whether the acquisition of such an asset was advisable and whether the PPECB would continue to exist as a viable entity. The volatile political situation in the country and prevalent sanctions fuelled their reservations. In addition, factors like accessibility to staff and clients had to be considered.

Management was requested to make a viability study, to be presented to the Board in October 1987. It was found that the estimated escalation in rent at the existing offices compared adversely when compared to acquisition of property. Over a period of twenty years, it was estimated that the Board would save over five million rand were they to purchase property. In addition, the long-term benefits of owning its own property far outweighed the short-term security of renting.

The recommendation was accepted and the Board eventually bought a piece of land in Plattekloof, near Cape Town. Construction began late in 1988, while the official opening took place on 9 August 1989. In his opening speech, Dr van Rensburg thanked the export industries for its contributions and declared that the building not only symbolized the faith which exists in the future of South Africa as an export country, but also in the ability of producers to supply products of international standard.

Forty-foot Integral Containers
Due to the perpetual shortage of shipping space for export produce, the PPECB ran a series of tests on forty-foot integral containers during the late 1980s. Normally placed on ships' decks, the Board was aware that exporters would benefit immensely from the additional space that these containers could provide. Unfortunately, tests prior to 1989 had proved unsuccessful. The existing forty-foot containers were simply not capable of regulating temperatures within accepted standards. In some trials, the temperature deviated by as much as six degrees Celsius along the length of the container. Such large fluctuations were obviously unacceptable when transporting sensitive produce such as deciduous and subtropical fruits.

During 1989, Lauritzen Reefers, a prominent supplier of charter ships to South Africa, developed a new forty-foot integral container and made it available to the PPECB for testing. Tests were conducted with avocados donated for this purpose by the Wayland Green organisation. The results were within acceptable norms and, for the first time, forty-foot containers became a viable option to exporters. These containers did much to alleviate the shipping space shortage in South Africa and the rest of the world.
From ‘Rejecters’ to ‘Inspectors’ to ‘Partners’
In 1914, the Fruit Export Act made the inspection of all fruit destined for export compulsory. Subsequently, the Act was revised a number of times, with various statutory bodies and organisations responsible for its enactment. In more recent years, the Department of Agriculture’s Agricultural Product Standards (APS) division was burdened with the task. The primary tasks of the Directorate were to ensure that South African export standards corresponded with international requirements, to grade and classify produce according to classes and to ensure that produce was correctly packaged and labelled. With deregulation, certain functions were assigned to organisations that act on behalf of the State and, in 1991, Government decided that the PPECB should appropriate the ‘quality inspection of agricultural produce for export’ from the Directorate. While the decision was made mainly because of its rationalisation policy in the early 1990s, Government also received appeals for appropriation from some of the perishable product export industries.

From October 1991, almost one hundred inspectors previously employed by the Directorate, became employees of the PPECB. From these, four Regional Managers were also appointed. The integration went smoothly despite disruptions caused by some inevitable personnel transfers.

The PPECB has a learning culture and policy to provide professional training for employees when required. Consequently, the PPECB, in collaboration with the Cape Technikon, created a special Agricultural Produce Inspector’s course. Inspectors were also required to attend a weeklong certification-training course at the Technikon.
Incorporation of the inspection services created new challenges for the PPECB. Prior to the take-over, the inspection services had a ‘rejection’ culture. With the exception of grapes, inspections for other products were conducted only at the harbours. Producers, after incurring transportation costs, ran the risk that products could be rejected once they reached the ports.

The PPECB’s chair, Dr Van Rensburg, felt very strongly that there had to be a shift away from being impersonal ‘inspectors and rejecters’ to a partnership culture whereby inspectors would strive to add value to client products. The PPECB also made it a priority to establish inland inspection points, close to production areas. These measures reduced producer costs and contributed much towards establishing the ‘partnership’ relationship.

**Citrus Exports to the Far East**

Prior to 1994, exports to the Far East were hampered by excessive control measures, which compromised product freshness. Japanese authorities insisted on a terrestrial phyto-sanitary quarantine period for a minimum of two weeks, while the voyage from South Africa to Japan took an additional three weeks. The delay meant produce reached the Japanese market six weeks after harvesting. To exacerbate matters, the volatile political situation in South Africa, and in particular the 1986 *Magoo’s Bar* bombing in Durban, led to all Japanese inspectors being recalled.

A delegation from South Africa, comprising of Dr Dave Keatch and Mr Mike Holtshauzen of the Department of Agriculture, Dr Paul Haupt of Unifruco, Dr Doug Stanton and Mr John McGlashan of Outspan and Dr Gawie Eksteen of the PPECB visited Japan during November 1993.

Dr Eksteen’s mission, as the technological expert on the team, was to convince the Japanese Department of Agriculture that the delivered product quality could be improved without compromising quarantine regulations. Quayside tests done on board ships in South Africa proved entirely successful and he believed that the same results could be achieved by instituting ‘voyage quarantine’. This would allow the products to reach the Japanese market three weeks earlier and consequently, assure freshness. The PPECB’s years of experience with in-transit cold treatment to countries such as the USA, Taiwan and Sri-Lanka enabled them not only to...
specify requirements to the Japanese Department of Agriculture, but also to apply the strict requirements in practice. The Japan authorities accepted the technical data provided by the PPECB. In-transit treatment of citrus was approved, with the provision that the total process should always be under the supervision and control of the PPECB. The very first consignment of citrus to Japan using the in-transit sterilisation process was shipped during the 1995 season aboard the vessel *Amber Cherry*. Upon arrival, Japanese quarantine authorities approved the fruit unconditionally. This breakthrough made citrus exports to Japan viable and opened the market for fresh produce exports to South Korea in subsequent years.

**Environmentally-friendly Refrigeration**

During the 1990s, increasing world environmental awareness also had an impact on the perishable export industry. Phasing out the use of CFC gasses had become an international priority. CFC gasses were widely used in the large refrigeration units on board ships, in trucks and in refrigerated containers. The issue aroused a lot of political debate and policies remained fluid for some time. A strategy, specifying gradual termination of CFC gas usage worldwide, was eventually formulated in the Montreal Protocol.

Replacement gasses proposed in the Montreal Protocol were considerably more expensive and would have cost exporters dearly. However, the PPECB recommended that exporters make use of ammonia cold stores, a much more cost effective, but still environmentally friendly option. Many South African cold stores have since been successfully converted and ammonia has proved to be just as effective as CFCs.

**The PPECB International Training Institute at Grabouw**

By 1994, the PPECB purchased a building in Grabouw which had been erected as a school and had later served as an old age home. The building was renovated and turned into a regional office and training centre for the PPECB.

During 1995, the demand for inland inspectors increased rapidly as virtually all exporters requested inspection at the packing points. This placed huge demands on the Board’s human resources and, in order to maintain service excellence, the training centre at Grabouw was upgraded and improved.

Priority was given to appoint and train student-inspectors from previously disadvantaged communities. All student-inspectors undergo an extensive three month training programme at Grabouw before they are deployed to assist senior inspectors at inspection points.

The centre was upgraded and extended in 1997 and has since been renamed the Overberg Conference Centre. Today, the
Deregulation chaos

Deregulation, according to Dr van Rensburg, was the single most important challenge that the PPECB ever faced, both logistically and in terms of its leadership role. Deregulation created chaos for producers and exporters and required of the PPECB, as the only remaining statutory body in the industry, to provide guidance through this difficult time.

Before deregulation, under the single channel marketing dispensation the PPECB had two main clients, namely Outspan and Unifruco. With deregulation, this increased almost overnight to about two hundred and thirty clients and became a huge administrative problem for the PPECB. Producers - competing to establish export markets - drove prices down, resulting in many bankruptcies that created a bad-debt nightmare for the PPECB. The PPECB’s financial and IT systems could not cope and a new system had to be acquired at the considerable cost of six million rand.

Re-establishing confidence in South African produce

Following deregulation, Dr van Rensburg and Mr Hubinger often visited Europe to meet with importers. They assured buyers that the PPECB would maintain quality control and standards. Concurrently, the PPECB placed inspectors at

The challenges presented by deregulation in the 1990s were the PPECB leadership’s biggest test to date. **Back**: Mr L. Jeffery, Mr A. Hawes, Mr J. Venter, Mr D. Gihwala, Mr P. van Zyl, Mr S. Khosa. **Front**: Mr G.G. Burelli, Mr C.J. Hubinger, Dr S.J.J. van Rensburg, Mr C Atkins, Mr H. Cyster.
European harbours, creating confidence in the Board’s ability to affect quality control from the farm to the consumer.

Dr van Rensburg and Mr Hubinger convinced European importers to insist on quality audits. This set the PPECB on course to qualify for ISO, EUREPGAP, SANAS, BRC and other certifications in subsequent years. The PPECB later became the first country in Africa, and only the sixth in the world, to be appointed as an EUREPGAP certification body.

In the process, the PPECB also managed to limit illegal exports by unscrupulous agents who saw deregulation as an opportunity to make money without adhering to quality standards or trade agreements. A typical example was meat that was exported as oranges in *Outspan* cartons.

**Establishing Producer Organisations**

The PPECB also met with local producers to warn them of the dangers of too many export agents, many of whom were out to make a quick profit at the producer’s expense. The PPECB proposed that producers re-organise themselves, work together on a voluntary basis and that they should consider forming producer organisations. The producers heeded the advice and before long, organisations such as Grapes SA and the Deciduous Fruit Producers’ Trust were formed.

**Door-to-Door exports**

The late 1990s saw the emergence of door-to-door exports. Traditional methods of transportation, such as conventional refrigerated ships and porthole containers, required multiple handling of produce. Although these methods were necessary and acceptable for less sensitive products and large volume exports, the double handling and breaks in the cold chain affected the quality of many temperature sensitive products.

In order to ensure the quality of such produce, the PPECB investigated a number of cooling and transportation methods in 1997. Integral containers, developed in the 1970s but proving too costly at the time, now became feasible and promised the perfect solution. Produce could literally be delivered from the farm to the market without physically being handled. This also meant that the producer could now, on the farm, pack the produce according to the client’s specification.

Integral containers’ inherent quality assurance is creating new opportunities for South African produce worldwide and has made door-to-door exports a reality.

**The Lanzerac meeting**

In 1998, a meeting was held between the PPECB and the Conference Lines at Lanzerac Estate Hotel in Stellenbosch. The SAECS members were unhappy about the liberty that non-SAECS lines had to charge tariffs outside the agreement, and the purpose of the meeting was to discuss the ten-year contract between the Board and SAECS. All the shipping lines were present and, expecting an ‘all or nothing’ fight, they scheduled the meeting to last at least three days.

The meeting was concluded within an hour. Dr Van Rensburg, with the backing of his board, felt that deregulation had already rendered the SAECS contract obsolete and proposed that the agreement be cancelled with immediate effect. The Conference was elated, as SAECS could now compete freely with the other lines on an equal footing.

The cancellation of the SAECS agreement also heralded a new era where – free from Government intervention – market forces would dictate and determine the industry’s future.
The PPECB in the new millennium

A historic perspective of the PPECB reveals that it has traditionally been technically focused on production and distribution, driven by a regulatory culture. The organisation has however made a major contribution over many decades to the perishable products industries of South Africa, as is evident from this book. The “new millennium” and future however requires a new understanding and thinking about the business environment of the PPECB and the challenges facing such a statutory organisation, in order to remain relevant and to be able to add value in the world of perishable products exports from South Africa.

The emphasis in perishable exports has shifted over the years as production volumes and varieties increased, technology improved and markets changed. One of the most important environmental changes in South Africa impacting on fresh produce exports was the deregulation of the marketing environment in 1997. Deregulation was in my view the single most important event in recent years to create a shift in responding to market demands, as we know it today. Never will the exports of fresh produce again be controlled from the production side - market conditions and consumer preferences have now become the dominant driving forces behind fresh produce trade. The new millennium challenges will differ significantly from the past. Although the South African economy in global terms is relatively small, the role that our perishable products play in the markets of the world is significant and growing.

World food markets and consumers today require compliance to very high standards of quality, reliability and consistency in supply, and above all, food safety assurances. Human health, combined with animal and plant health as well as social and economic requirements by everyone involved in the process from “farm to fork”, are criteria that will drive the actions and behaviour of role players in the supply chain of fresh produce in future. This will not only be required for food products, but will impact on every process, all equipment and every human involvement in the food supply process.

The future challenges in food supply will therefore require that role players and service providers like the PPECB must be able to prove that they are internationally credible, can offer services of high professional standards over the total supply chain and understand and respond effectively to the very dynamic and competitive market conditions which will prevail. This will require business partnerships with customers and suppliers, based on sustainable relationships to develop integrated business solutions that will create value and ensure long-term growth and profitability.

Ultimately, all South Africans need to contribute to the development of trade at global level, to the benefit of South Africa and it’s people. The impact on the PPECB is clear. The way we respond to above challenges will determine our success and significance in the new millennium. We will need to develop a new understanding of global trends and opportunities. Not only we will need our people, systems, technology and other resources to comply with the requirements of our customers over the total supply chain, but we will have to offer tailor-made solutions for the differentiated needs of our customers. Responding positively to these changing requirements and finally exceeding customer expectations, have to be our main focus areas.

I believe we have the capacity, the will and the drive to become part of a new solution to international trade in food supply, and that the PPECB will play an even more significant role in the years to come.

Mr Neels Hubinger, Chief Executive, PPECB.
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The carrier beyond...

- Beyond expectations of their clients with one of the world’s biggest and most diverse fleet of modern reefer ships
- Beyond limits with extensive capacity and experience in the carriage of perishables as well as vehicles, yachts, project and deck cargoes
- Beyond tradition, by pioneering new services and fostering new trade lanes

Seatrade Reefer Chartering is truly the carrier beyond oceans