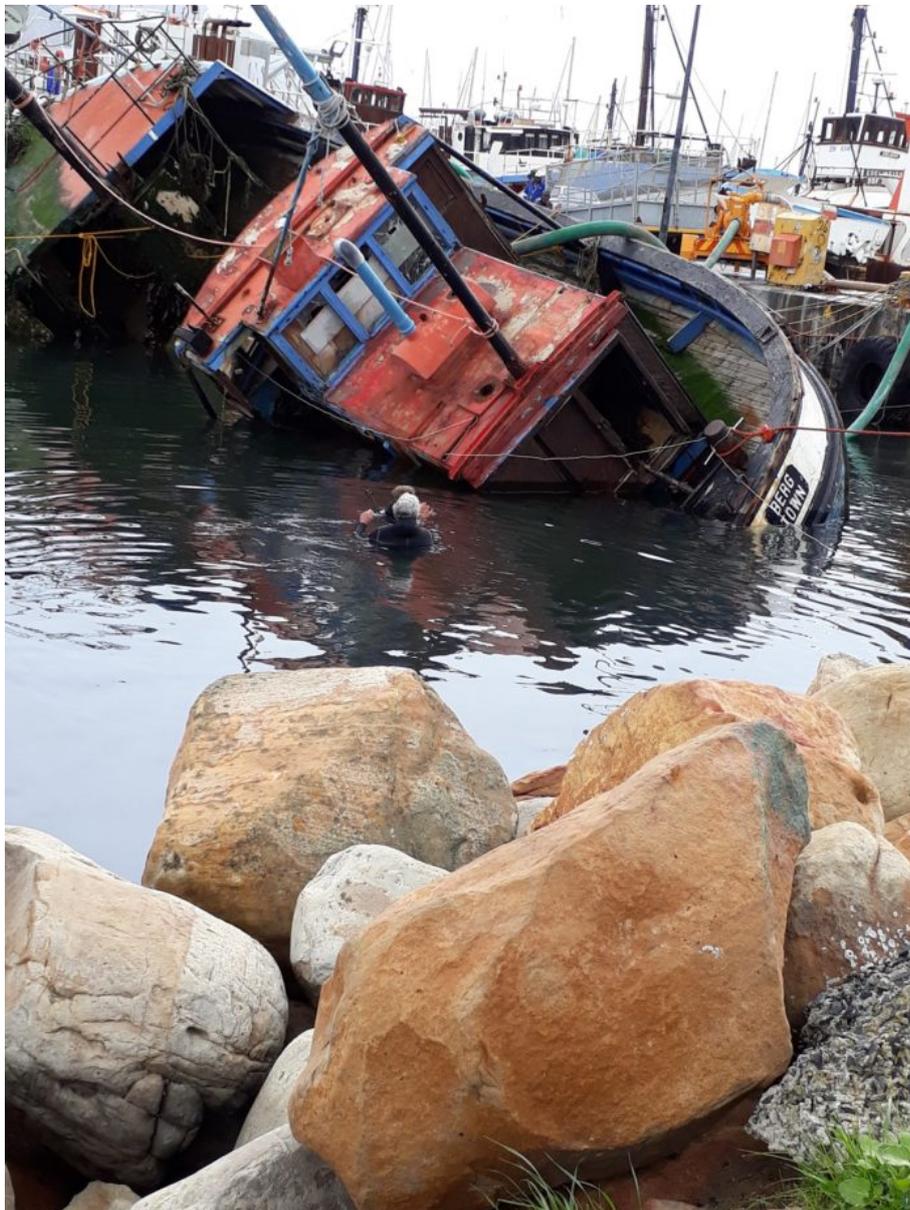


- Vessels & Boat Building

Sinking boat – The Myth of a Safe Harbour

By Gary Mills

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Hout Bay's infrastructure has been in crisis for years. The situation has gone from bad to embarrassing. The shipwrights hands are tied but there is massive frustration...

The present situation in Hout Bay, Cape Town's harbour is this: Departmental bungling and corruption coupled with a lack of will has already

seen the installation of incompetent and mostly absent Harbour Masters, allowing for the increasing crime, malicious damage and theft to both harbour property and privately owned boats.

In fact, so weak have the authorities become that local miscreants have created an environment which smacks of the Wild West. The South African Police water unit has been openly pelted with rocks, and guns have been fired within the harbour in broad daylight.

In the past month another three boats were vandalised and have sunk. I was recently called out by a shipwright operating within in the harbour, as his boat was one of those vandalised.

I dived on the boat to inspect for any serious damage, as well as to empty out his hold in preparation to raise the boat.

Shipwrights high and dry

This shipwright had completed repairs to a boat, KOVI, which continued to remain on the slipway cradle for several weeks after completion of repairs.

Even though the KOVI is now finally back in the water, the wasted time spent hogging the slipway due to delayed payment has negatively affected many boat owners who are waiting in an ever-increasing line to get up on the slip for survey or repairs.

The shipwright in this case has three other boats lined up for repair work and cannot tackle those jobs unless the boats can go up on the slip. He is also unable to receive down payment on the pending jobs until the owners are sure that work can proceed.

This requires them to be slipped. Due to non-payment this shipwright is also cash-strapped and unable to afford to pay for the pumps required in the raising of his own boat. So while the stand-off continues, his boat and many others are deteriorating on the seabed.

Compliant fall on deaf ears

The main problem is that if the Department of Agriculture, Forestry & Fisheries continues its abuse and disregard toward the industry, it could soon collapse.

Boat owners require their relevant permits to ply their trade – they are then able to go to sea to earn an income, which in turn enables them to insure their boats in the event of such recent eventualities. Without an income they cannot pay their crew and are at risk of losing experienced individuals who make up their team.

The lack of control and will of the Harbour Master to take remedial action is causing a backlog of boats waiting to go up on the slip, to do repair work to their boats in order to be able to receive their annual survey clearance from the South African Maritime Safety Authority.

Without a clearance certificate, the boats will be forced to go to sea illegally which in turn is a liability, as neither the boat, nor crew are covered through either the boat insurance, or their own cover should their lives be threatened or if they are injured at sea.

Safety and refuge a joke

A harbour is supposed to be a place of safety and refuge from the extreme elements encountered out in the open sea.

Today a boat owner has to try to get his boat out to sea as quickly as possible. This is in order to avoid a greater threat now experienced within the harbour surrounds, whereby boats are being targeted both day and night for their non-ferrous metals, by the criminal element.

All of these issues result in the insurance companies raising their costs. Boats are now becoming too much of a high risk for them to cover and the restrictions on the cover are making insurance a worthless expense.

Kalk Bay slipway

Another example of a weakened Authority was the recent abuse of the Kalk Bay slipway.

A boat owner had his boat up on the slip for the better part of a year, supposedly waiting for an alternator for one of his engines – so said the Harbour master.

This has to be a most pathetic excuse in an attempt to validate a situation which has denied other boat owners the opportunity to do repairs to their own boats.

A boat does not have to be on the slip if it has a missing alternator – another pathetic example of abuse by certain individuals in the industry, who believe themselves to be above others and who are able to manipulate Authority.

There was a time when the Harbour Master would keep an eye on work being done on boats when they were up on the slip, and if he was convinced that the slip was being abused he would chase the owner to remove his boat back to the water.

Failure to settle harbour bills would result in a visit from the Sheriff of the Court and that was followed by an attachment and public auction of the boat, if the owner did not pay up.

What we have currently in our fishing harbours is a vicious circle spiralling out of control – to say the least.

