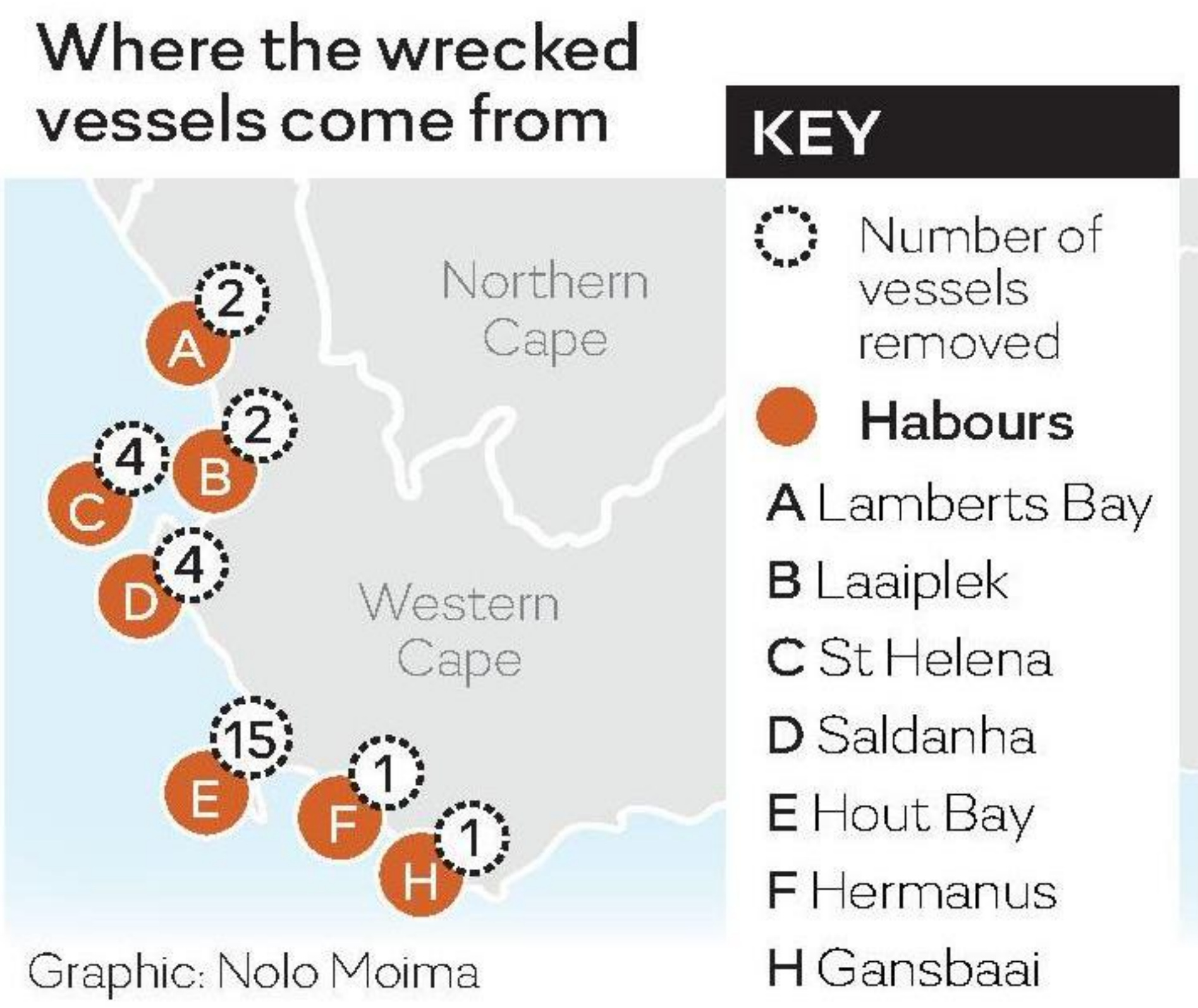


Race against time to rescue collapsing fishing harbours

By **BOBBY JORDAN**

- Urgent work is under way to stop fishing harbours crumbling into the sea.
Public works minister Thulas Nxesi said 12 proclaimed small-boat harbours had “been left unmaintained” to the point where boat-owners joke that their vessels are safer outside than in.
About R400m is being spent on repairs to slipways and shore cranes, and 29 sunken vessels have been removed from seven harbours where commercial operations have been hampered due to years of neglect.
The Sunday Times has established that:
 - Crime at some harbours is so bad that basic infrastructure has vanished, including power supply to navigational beacons;
 - Two major fishing companies have stopped operating out of Hout Bay harbour. Earlier this year protesters ransacked the harbour master’s office and burnt down a government warehouse;
 - Several harbours were severely silted up. In Gordon’s Bay, the National Sea Rescue Institute battled to launch its vessels due to a sand bank across the harbour entrance – a problem dredging has now fixed;
 - Political infighting at the department of agriculture, forestry and fisheries, custodian of the facilities, caused a management melt-down that culminated in the suspension of a R50m tender to secure SA’s two major fishing harbours, Kalk Bay and Hout Bay.



Now harbours are being fixed and new ones are on the cards in the Northern Cape (Port Nolloth), the Eastern Cape (Port St Johns), and KwaZulu-Natal (Port Edward). The target is to attract investment of around R20bn by 2020 and create 3,000 jobs.

So far, the repair programme has created more than 200 jobs and provided work worth R7m to about 20 small and medium-sized companies.

Public works projects manager Riyaadh Kara said the project was kicking into gear following detailed preparatory work. “We had to determine the depths of the harbours by completing bathymetric surveys and get the necessary environmental approvals. These harbours weren’t maintained adequately over the years and we had to develop a baseline to work with,” he said.

Money had been transferred to the implementing agent, the Coega Development Corporation, and contract details were being finalised. The “special intervention” was being funded as part of the government development programme Operation Phakisa.

Addressing a media briefing in Gordon’s Bay, Nxesi said the government needed to acknowledge it had managed its property portfolio “like a spaza shop”.

A key problem is the yawning gap between the jobs expectations of local communities and the number of work opportunities that are actually available. Nxesi has appealed for partnerships, such as a successful initiative in Hout Bay where poachers were retrained as commercial divers.

But coastal communities are cynical after years of mismanagement by the department of agriculture, forestry and fisheries. Frustration over maintenance delays sparked a tug-of-war between public works and the Western Cape government, with premier Helen Zille saying the province should invoke its legal mandate to manage the harbours in its jurisdiction.

Hout Bay community leader Gregg Louw said harbours would never be secure unless the government adopted a holistic approach to resolving coastal poverty.

“It doesn’t help if public works throws money at fixing up harbours when coastal communities are saying they will burn down government infrastructure,” Louw said.

R54bn

THE AMOUNT

the oceans economy contributed to GDP in 2010

R177bn

THE AMOUNT

targeted for oceans economy contribution by 2033

12

CURRENT NUMBER

of proclaimed fishing harbours



State properties were managed like a spaza shop

Thulas Nxesi
Public works minister