

Boost for NMMU Ocean Sciences

REPORTER

NELSON Mandela Metropolitan University's (NMMU) efforts towards the establishment of the country's first dedicated maritime centre of excellence were boosted with the recent transfer of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) building into its name.

The university now officially owns the adjacent CSIR building that will serve as the institution's Ocean Sciences Campus, effectively catapulting the already advanced work towards the establishment of the envisaged marine and maritime-related hub.

The official transfer of the property is the culmination of two years of extensive planning and strategising on how the university's R60 million investment into the venture would unfold.

In this time, the university has been part of a broad consultative process both internally and externally to actively engage all relevant stakeholders in the development of the new campus.

It has always been the university's vision to have dedicated Ocean Sciences Campus and, when Vice-Chancellor Professor Derrick Swartz learnt of the possible sale of CSIR building, an opportunity was seized.

The Ocean Sciences Campus is the Univer-

sity's answer to what has emerged as the country's least explored economic resource – its oceans.

The blue, or oceans, economy has become a major focus for South Africa, with government's massive Operation Phakisa initiative pushing to unlock and effectively tap into the largely untapped oceans economy by capitalising on the country's 3 200km coastline.

The University's overarching strategy towards specialising in ocean sciences studies is in line with Operation Phakisa, which aims to create a million jobs and inject up to R177 billion into the national economy by 2033.

NMMU has significant research capabilities in maritime and ocean sciences. It is also well positioned in Algoa Bay and boasts proximity and access to two major ports, effectively boosting its potential as a major player in the blue economy.

The University's vision for the Campus is that of a research commons, innovatively bringing together the expertise of multiple faculties in a multi- and transdisciplinary approach to create new ways of thinking and doing in relation to ocean sciences.

"Because it's a new thing for us, we have gone about encouraging faculties to conceptualise programmes that would fall under it," said Institutional Planning senior director, Professor Heather Nel.

"This is very important because we might

focus on sustainability of the oceans – which is the core aim of this – but we also need to find a balance between science and impact on environment."

With the sale officially through, work is set continue in earnest towards the redesigning of the space to become a leading world-class maritime campus.

Partnership is a key aspect of the University's ocean science strategy because of the lack of all the necessary expertise to tackle the space and unlock the full potential of the surrounding oceans.

The University will continue to host various roundtable discussions and symposiums on the ocean's economy, while forging partnerships with experienced institutions in the maritime field that often lead to an exchange of skills.

"We partner with other universities nationally, as well as with global institutions that are leaders in maritime – Norway, Finland, Sweden and Southampton in the United Kingdom – to explore staff and student exchanges. That is proving to be very useful. There is a lot that can be done through partnering that can't be done alone," Prof Nel said.

The Ocean Sciences Campus will not house all of the University's maritime programmes but will instead have a postgraduate focus so as not to duplicate existing courses that tie or feed into ocean sciences.



The Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) building in Summerstrand now belongs to NMMU. It will serve as the University's Ocean Sciences Campus. PHOTO: SUPPLIED