

Stefan Bulow buys polar training ship for new maritime sustainability mission

Former Hamburg Bulk Carriers boss to refit SA Agulhas as research vessel in support of UN Ocean Decade programme

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J*S Maritime Partners founder Captain Stefan Bulow has long been fascinated with the need to promote maritime research. Photo: Ian Lewis

Hamburg's J*S Maritime Partners has emerged as the buyer of a former South African Antarctic supply and training ship for a new role as a deep-sea research vessel.

The legendary 112-loa SA Agulhas (built 1978), which has been operated as a cadet training ship by the South African Maritime Safety Authority for the past decade, is being handed over to J*S Maritime founder Captain Stefan Bulow at a ceremony in Cape Town on Tuesday.

The ship will operate in support of the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development programme, of which J*S Maritime is an official partner.

Bulow, a former polar research ship master who went on to become a respected executive in senior positions at German shipowners Reederei Leonhardt & Blumberg, Deutsche Afrika-Linien, Ernst Russ and HBC Hamburg Bulk Carriers, said in a LinkedIn post that the SA Agulhas will be refitted for its new role at a shipyard in Cape Town.

“We will start a larger German South African Bilateral Cooperation, the ‘Sea Experience’ project, which will begin with a cadet training partnership programme and employment and will be followed by other cooperations and support for the South African maritime cluster, for marine, environmental and climate research, marine technology, research voyages and sustainable tourism in South Africa,” he said.

Bulow, who is chairman of Bimco's marine environment committee, told South Africa's Maritime Review that he has long been fascinated with the need to promote maritime research.

This, together with his interest in sustainable shipping and the pressing need to solve the expected shortage of ratings and officers, prompted him to launch J*S Maritime Partners in 2018 as a business that might start addressing these problems.

According to Bulow, the process of acquiring the SA Agulhas was a long one, especially since Samsa had strict stipulations in its sale tender that potential buyers should "demonstrate by means of a detailed plan how the sale of the vessel will positively impact the Republic of South Africa" and have quantifiable terms for training cadets, as well as maintaining the current crew.



The SA Agulhas was commissioned to supply South Africa's Antarctic research base. Photo: Jonathan Boonzaier

The 6,100-gt Mitsubishi Heavy Industries-built SA Agulhas was commissioned by the government to supply the South African National Antarctic Expedition research base, as well as weather stations that it operated on inhospitable islands deep in the South Atlantic Ocean.

On these voyages the ship was also used to conduct scientific research.

Several times it made international headlines when it went to the rescue of other ships that got into difficulties.

Samsa took over the SA Agulhas when it was replaced by a new ship in 2012. It was refitted as a training ship and on one voyage had an all-female crew. Training voyages were often tied with charters to research institutes.

The authority said it was forced to retire the ship as it had become a drain on its funds. [\(Copyright\)](#)