

Ahmed Mohammed Al Abri

CEO, MARAFI

Well versed in the intricate workings of port operations and with vast experience in business and maritime affairs, Dr. Ahmed Al Abri is now in charge of expanding and streamlining the operations of Omani ports, a strategy that is set to take the country's logistics sector to the next level.

Dr. Al Abri started his career in the UK, where he was trained for a year at a shipbuilding firm called Vosper Thornycroft, and then came back to Oman, where he worked as a naval architect in the Royal Navy of Oman for 15 years. After that, he held several leadership roles in companies like AJIG, Oman Drydock Company, and Duqm Naval Dockyard. Towards the end of 2017, he became the CEO of Marafi, a port operations and management company established by the government. Marafi is a subsidiary of Oman Global Logistics Group (ASYAD), an entity that was established in 2016 and brought together major government institutions under one umbrella with the goal to maximize the economic and financial returns from public investments in ports, free zones, land and sea transport, and logistics services companies. Marafi is 51% owned by ASYAD and 49% owned by the State General Reserve Fund of Oman. The mission of Marafi is to develop the Omani logistics sector in order for it to become one of the top 10 in the world.

Currently, Marafi's portfolio includes a series of ports of various sizes, depths, and facilities, ranging from the large cruise terminals to small jetties. One of the main objectives of Marafi is to develop smaller ports along the coast of Oman which will complement perfectly the activity of the larger ports of Muscat and Sohar. As Dr. Al Abri explains, operating a port for small vessels is a totally different kind of business compared to a large port, because even though the commodities that are transported are pretty similar, the focus is more on the regional market rather than the international one. In 2018, Marafi started commercial operations at the Suwaiq Port, which was originally a small fishing port in the north of Oman, and its success has exceeded all expectations. As a result, Marafi is now working

on expanding the port to accommodate a larger number of vessels. In addition to that, the Suwaiq Port's surrounding area is also in development, and Dr. Al Abri is encouraging investors to look into this attractive opportunity. He makes the point that *"no port can live without a port cluster around it."*

It's also important to mention that Suwaiq Port is the nearest port to the Khazaen Economic City project, a 51 km2 metropolis which is currently under development, and where Marafi will build and operate the first dry port in Oman. The dry port will be an inland terminal connected to a seaport by rail or road, which will operate as a center for the transshipment of cargo to other inland destinations. The connection between Suwaiq Port and Khazaen, Dr. Al Abri explains, will unlock a tremendous amount of opportunities for businesses to thrive.

In the first quarter of 2019, Marafi started managing the small ports of Khasab and Shinas, both located in northern Oman. Khasab Port is the only Omani port with a strategic position inside the Gulf, and with its 10-meter depth, it presents itself as an attractive opportunity for further development. Dr. Al Abri highlights that there is already ongoing work towards building two new terminals, as well as developing the surrounding land with the help of investors. Aside from that, Khasab Port is becoming an increasingly popular destination for tourists traveling on cruise ships.

Marafi also manages the Port of Sohar, which is the main gateway to Qatar, and which will be very well complemented by the development of its smaller neighbor, Port Shinas. Recently, Oman Oil Marketing Company signed an agreement with Marafi to provide bunker fuel services at the port berths and anchorage areas of Muscat's Sultan Qaboos Port, an initiative which aims to increase the overall performance and functionality of the port.

In Dr. Al Abri's opinion, Oman's logistics sector is moving at a good pace towards achieving its set goals. However, he believes the government's targets for 2040 are very ambitious, and getting there will require a lot of hard work and high performance. Even if Oman is still largely dependent on oil and it will continue to be for a while Dr. Al Abri is convinced that the ongoing diversification that's happening across the economy will complement the oil industry and decrease the stress that's caused by the constant oil price

My message to youth:

You are blessed to be in a country that is loved by all. We're a country where heritage is not only seen in architecture and forts and books, but we've been left with heritage in the man-ners, attitude, and how we present ourselves to the world.

My message about Oman:

Pay more attention to Oman, because over the years it has developed into a modern state, and everything has been done to stabilize the country, not only from a security point of view, but also economically. Oman is now addressing every single aspect that would encourage a safe and successful investment.

fluctuations. With a coastline of 1,700 km, Oman has a huge potential to become a global logistics hub, and if it all goes according to plan, the sector will contribute immensely to the country's economy.

For Marafi, other future plans include developing a large terminal for transporting minerals at the Sohar Port, as well as starting the development of Duqm Port's superstructure for terminals. As part of its strategy, the company is also actively looking into opportunities for managing port terminals outside of the country.

All the ports that are operated by Marafi employ people who have extensive port experience, from dealing with all types of cargo to handling embarkations and disembarkations of tourists. But, as Dr. Al Abri proudly explains, Marafi never had to hire new people each time it started managing a port, because instead it kept the workers that were already there and benefitted from their skills while building everything around them. For Dr. Al Abri, this is great proof that Omanis are very capable and that they can definitely play key roles in the ongoing development of the country as a whole. He is very passionate about making Oman's vision a reality, and he believes this will have to be a collective effort, but it will be well worth it in the end.

Affiliations, Awards & Honors

Chartered Engineer by the British Council of Engineering
Member of the Royal Institute of Naval Architects
Board Member - Salalah Free Zone



DOB: February 20, 1977

Marital status: Married, with children

Education:

1998 - Bachelor of Engineering, Naval Architecture, University of Southampton, UK

2005 - Master of Science, Maritime Engineering Sciences, University of Southampton, UK

2013 - PhD, Operational & Environmental Management of Ports & Shipyards, Portsmouth University, UK

Spoken Languages: Arabic, English & French

Sector: Logistics

Ownership: Public

Established in: 2017