

BRUCE SMITH/AP

The South Carolina State Ports Authority said cargo volume increased by 8 percent in 2014 from the previous fiscal year.

Income and revenue rise at state's ports

Gain in cargo volume produces pair of double-digit increases

By John McDermott
Post and Courier

CHARLESTON — Propelled by a strong finish, the State Ports Authority reported double-digit gains in income and revenue for its last fiscal year as cargo volume gains outpaced the industry average.

Operating earnings came in at 20 percent above projections, at $14.3 million, the maritime agency said Wednesday.

Revenue for the year that ended June 30 totaled $164 million, a 17 percent gain from the previous 12-month period.

The SPA said the last three months of the fiscal 2014 year was its strongest quarter since 2007, when the last recession began.

"We had a good fourth quarter in both imports and exports and empty containers, all the segments," CEO Jim Newsome said.

The SPA's core business of handling containers has been on the rise since hitting bottom four years ago, though it still hasn't surpassed the peak set in 2006. Volume increased by 8 percent in 2014 from the previous fiscal year to 957,000 boxes.

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>
> **JIM NEWSOME,** CEO of State Ports Authority

"Our growth is over twice that of the U.S. port market, which is only 3 percent," Newsome said.

Also, he added, breakbulk cargo, which is made up of goods that are too large or heavy to be shipped in containers, remains a solid source of business for the SPA, though volume declined from 2013.

"If you go down to the Columbus Street Terminal today, you'll see three breakbulk ships down there," Newsome said.

In addition, the agency's new "inland port" in Spartanburg County continues to attract new users, said Bill McLean, senior vice president of operations.

McLean noted that the facility, which gives shippers a direct rail link between the Upstate and the Port of Charleston, was built last year primarily to serve the nearby BMW assembly plant in Greer. Exports from the German luxury automaker now account for nearly half the activity at the 100-acre hub, he said.

And with more business expected as BMW expands, "this is going to continue to grow," McLean said.

Newsome predicted that the Port of Charleston will likely continue to benefit from the Southeast's growing population and expanding manufacturing base.

"It's probably the only place in the country where that is happening," Newsome told the SPA board at its monhtly meeting in Charleston.

Chairman Bill Stern said last year's "solid financial performance is essential" given the big-ticket spending plan the SPA is pursuing, including construction on the future North Charleston port terminal, the harbor-deepening project and refurbishments to the bustling Wando Welch Terminal in Mount Pleasant.