

South Africa: Port operator says NCT backlog will be cleared in two weeks

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South African port operator Transnet on Friday said it anticipates the backlog at the troubled Ngqura Container Terminal (NCT) will be cleared in two weeks, following many weeks of severe delays for the citrus industry.

Operations have improved at the Durban Container Terminal and Port of Cape Town, it said.

It explained the NCT had been hit by “unprotected industrial action” over “overpayment of a short-term incentive and other related matters such as equipment failure and transport”.

To date, 13 employees have been suspended for misconduct that took place during the strike. But following a court interdict earlier this week, Transnet says productivity is now returning to normal.

The company commented that the go-slow has impacted the agricultural and automotive industries and says it is engaging with customers to address backlogs.

Transnet's acting group CEO Mohammed Mahomed is conducting sessions at Ngqura, Cape Town and Durban addressing and highlighting the need to improve operational performance.

The company has set up national and regional command centers to monitor port operations and improve operational efficiencies.

“Transnet remains a key cog in the South African economy and our role cannot be emphasized enough. Performance challenges however continue to persist in certain critical areas,” it said.

Speaking to FreshFruitPortal.com a week ago, Justin Chadwick of the Citrus Growers Association of Southern Africa (CGA) and Hannes de Waal, CEO of the Sundays River Citrus Company, both criticized Transnet.

They said that its near-monopoly on South African port operations meant that the citrus industry's alternative options for ports to use were extremely limited.

Chadwick also said that he had alerted Transnet that it would need to make sure there was sufficient infrastructure available for the increased volumes expected from the Eastern Cape, but pointed out that this did not happen.

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