

Numsa numbers may hobble Ngqura plan

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The militant National Union of Metalworkers (Numsa) appears to be trying to widen a month-long strike at the Ngqura container terminal in the Coega Industrial Development Zone to include the Port Elizabeth harbour. But the campaign may be floundering because of a lack of numbers and recognition issues.



A strike at Ngqura Harbour is not disrupting operations at the port according to Transnet. Image: [Port Technology](#)

The union says the Port Elizabeth Labour Court has rejected an application to prevent a secondary strike against Transnet by its members. But in a flurry of claims and counterclaims Transnet says it was not involved in the court case, which may have been brought by employers it was unable or unwilling to identify.

The Ngqura strike, on since 25 April, may yet lay claim to be one of the longest in SA's history. It has sparked concerns that the parties have shown little sensitivity about the effect the standoff is having on the Nelson Mandela Bay area's crucial automotive industry. The industry relies heavily on imports and exports through Ngqura.

The terminal is a container trans-shipment hub for global shipping companies and complements the export of key commodities and agro-processing products.

Numsa's demands relate mainly to staffing levels, crane operating hours, labour brokers and the payment of a transport allowance.

Application rejected

Numsa says the Labour Court has rejected an application by unidentified employers to prevent a secondary strike by members against Transnet in Port Elizabeth.

The court's finding contradicts an earlier one by the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA), which sat in Port Elizabeth. Transnet says the CCMA dismissed the Numsa bid to picket at the nearby main Port Elizabeth harbour terminal, in support of the Ngqura strike.

Claims and counterclaims have also been made about violence, which is said to have included petrol bombings and stonings.

The state utility said earlier this month that 16 houses belonging to workers at Ngqura container terminal had been stoned and petrol-bombed since Numsa launched its strike action.

However, Numsa has denied that any of its members have been involved in the violence. It has countered that it has been the homes of Numsa workers in urban areas surrounding Port Elizabeth that had come under attack. But both conceded this week no one has been hurt in the strikes, and that the violence has since ceased.

Attempts to widen strike

But widening the strike from Ngqura to Port Elizabeth will have little chance of success



Numsa wants to widen its strike to include operations at Port Elizabeth harbour. Image: [Panaramio](#)

if Transnet is correct in its claims that Numsa does not have enough members at the Port Elizabeth terminal.

Transnet spokesman Mboniso Sigonyela says its records show there are no Numsa members at the Port Elizabeth terminal. Its recognised unions, the South African Transport and Allied Workers' Union (Satawu) and Utatu Sarwhu, a new union merged from previous labour groupings, represent more than 90% of Transnet employees in Port Elizabeth.

Transnet has said Numsa represents less than half a percent of its 60,000-strong workforce nationally. It says Numsa has 124 members among the almost 600 workers at the Ngqura container terminal. Numsa has claimed 500.

Denial of court action

Sigonyela claims there has been no action against Transnet at the court. He says he does not know who the unidentified applicants were. The parastatal is falling back on the original CCMA ruling, which upheld Numsa's failure to prove Transnet was "unreasonable".

Transnet has shown that Numsa had no members at the Port Elizabeth terminal and that the majority of recognised unions did not support Numsa's action, he says.

Transnet has also shown to the CCMA that picketing at the Port Elizabeth terminal would be disruptive to other operators in the port. Transnet itself has a well-established set of business continuity measures that have minimised the strike's effects on operations and customers at Ngqura, it says.

"The (CCMA) ruling confirms that Transnet's handling of the matter was fair and reasonable," the company says. It has maintained a lock-out on all striking employees.

Utatu Sarwhu deputy general secretary Eddie de Klerk says his union and Satawu are not on strike at the Ngqura container terminal, and that they make up 491 of about 600 workers there.

Source: Business Day via I-Net Bridge

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