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AGRICULTURE MEC KAMADLOPHA-MTHETHWA BROKERS BREAKTHROUGH AS SUGAR MILLING STRIKE ENDS AFTER 18-DAY DEADLOCK

The protracted strike that halted operations in South Africa's sugar milling sector has finally ended after decisive intervention by the KwaZulu-Natal MEC for Agriculture and Rural Development, Mrs Thembeni kaMadlopha-Mthethwa. She facilitated fresh talks between sugar unions and employers after negotiations had been deadlocked for 18 days.

The MEC, whose role was strictly to create a conducive platform for unions to negotiate wages and better conditions of employment, convened the parties at KwaShukela in Mount Edgecombe, Durban from 01 September 2026. The positive talks yielded a breakthrough on 08 September. Workers have now resumed full milling operations across KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga, ending almost four weeks of protected industrial action.

The settlement, signed under the Bargaining Unit of the Bargaining Council for the Sugar Manufacturing and Refining Industry (NBCS), covers all employees in the bargaining unit. According to the papers signed parties, the settlement includes a 6% wage increase across the board, effective and backdated to 01 April 2026.

- Payment of six days of the strike period, as confirmed by union organizers
- Commitment to continued engagement on conditions of employment.

The MEC said she is happy that her intervention had yielded fruit as workers resume operations, ending months of no work.

"I saw that agriculture needed every sector to sit down and come up with an amicable solution. It was very difficult but fortunately they were all willing to settle. They were also aware of the problems that were created during the strike because the principle of 'no work no pay' was being implemented but for them it was not an issue of getting paid or not but to find an amicable solution. I called them to sit down. After a few days the solution was found and they are now back at work."

MEC kaMadlopha-Mthethwa also shared her relief for all involved the impact the strike has had on the ailing sector,

"Sugarcane growers in KZN's North Coast had nowhere to deliver cane during peak milling season. The stoppage threatened an already precarious industry still reeling from Tongaat Hulett's business rescue process and cheap imports."

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ISSUED BY THE KWAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT.