

Eskom declares dispute with unions

Eskom has declared a dispute with its three trade unions over preconditions introduced in wage negotiations.



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“Eskom has declared a dispute with trade unions the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa (NUMSA) and Solidarity over the precondition that NUM and NUMSA introduced as part of the wage negotiations,” said the power utility on Wednesday.

The Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) on Wednesday closed the Labour Relations Act (LRA) Section 150 process as parties deadlocked during talks.

NUM and NUMSA demanded that irrespective of the outcome of the disciplinary process, no member should be dismissed.

At a meeting convened through the auspices of the CCMA last week, the three recognised unions all in principle agreed to Eskom’s three-year wage proposal and conditions of employment.

This would entail bargaining unit employees getting a salary adjustment of 7.5% in 2018/19 and 7% in 2019/20 and 7% in 2020/21, an annual cost of living (CPI) adjustment to their housing allowance as well as a once-off cash payment of R10,000.

However, at the time NUM and NUMSA introduced a precondition that Eskom should not discipline employees who took part in the July/August unprotected strike. The power utility could not agree to this precondition.

In June 2018, NUM and NUMSA defied the Labour Relations Act (LRA) and its essential service provisions and embarked on unprotected strike action.

“This strike action included various acts of criminality, including alleged acts of sabotage and destruction of property. The industrial action led to the power system being constrained and rotational load shedding for three days, negatively impacting the economy,” said Eskom.

Public Enterprises Minister Pravin Gordhan intervened in the matter and convened a meeting where all parties reached an understanding that the unions would end all unlawful industrial action and the company would not discipline employees who engaged in the June 2018 unlawful industrial action.

Following that, negotiations resumed in a peaceful and orderly fashion at the Eskom Central Bargaining Forum. However, no agreement was reached and at the end of July 2018, all parties commenced with the Section 150 mediation process in terms of the LRA.

In July, some employees embarked on further unprotected industrial action until 3 August 2018, despite a court interdict and company communication to staff reminding employees that Eskom is an essential service.

“These events again led to power system constraints and load shedding. The power system will take about 30 days to recover from the effects of the illegal strike and there is a risk of further load shedding during this period,” said Eskom.

The power utility said it reserves its right to follow the disciplinary process in line with the company’s Disciplinary Code and Procedure.

“In an effort to bring the process to a conclusion, Eskom has referred a mutual interest dispute to the CCMA. We remain positive that the process will be expeditiously resolved.”

Meanwhile, the power utility said there is a low probability of rotational load shedding on Thursday.

“We continue to encourage residents and businesses to please use electricity sparingly to ease the demand of electricity. Please switch off geysers as well as all non-essential lighting and electricity appliances to assist in reducing demand.”