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Peak citrus volumes put Durban under pressure

7 Aug 2026

Durban faces mounting congestion as South Africa's citrus export season reaches its peak, prompting industry efforts to ease supply chain pressure. Source: FreshGro Citrus Growers

South Africa's citrus export season has reached peak volumes, placing pressure on the Port of Durban as supply chain constraints affect the movement of fruit.

The Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa (CGA) said it was engaging with industry players to find solutions and ease congestion at the port.

The pressure comes as the CGA revised its total citrus export estimate for the 2026 season down from 209.4 million to 205.3m 15kg cartons following its latest variety focus group meetings.

The season has been challenging for growers, with rain disrupting harvesting in northern production regions early in the season, followed by flooding in the Western and Eastern Cape in May.

Geopolitical instability has added further pressure to the export supply chain. Citrus exports to the Middle East, which under normal conditions account for about 20% of South Africa's exports, have been affected by the conflict in the region since February. The CGA said the conflict had also increased input and logistics costs, including diesel and, most notably, shipping rates.

The potential spread of the conflict to the Red Sea and possible disruption at the Port of Jeddah were growing concerns for shipping routes and the options available to growers, it added.

The association has established a crisis committee to monitor developments and provide regular information to the industry.

The latest export forecast reflects reductions in several citrus categories. The mandarin estimate has been lowered by 2.7m cartons, while the Navel orange forecast is down 4.6m cartons from the original March estimate. The grapefruit estimate has been reduced by 1.7m cartons.

Lemon exports, however, have performed better than initially expected, with the estimate increasing by 5.4m cartons from the original forecast.

Valencia packing is expected to peak over the next two to three weeks, with the season potentially running longer than usual.

The CGA has reiterated its call for accelerated private-sector participation in South Africa's rail and port infrastructure, saying improvements to logistics capacity are becoming increasingly urgent as the citrus industry pursues long-term export growth.