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Grower Communication

2023 sugar cane crushing season about to start

Mackay Sugar, CANEGROWERS Mackay and Australian Cane Farmers Association (ACFA) have met and agreed on the start of the 2023 sugar cane crushing season.

Following an extensive maintenance period conducted by Mackay Sugar, the current plan sees the three sugar mills starting as follows:

Farleigh Mill	Thursday 1 June 2023
Marian Mill	Tuesday 6 June (1st milling train)
Racecourse Mill	Thursday 8 June

The start of this year's crushing season will take place in an environment marked by record high sugar prices, but also one that has seen a tight availability of labour resources.

According to Mackay Sugar's General Manager Operations Carl Morton, it has been an unprecedented maintenance season - not only cut short following the late stop to the 2022 crushing season, but also arising from significant challenges in finding the resources needed to carry out planned maintenance and capital jobs.

"Our newly re-vitalised planning and scheduling systematic has certainly proven its value," he said.

"Without these work planning improvements, combined with the dedicated effort made by our employees, starting this year's crushing season by 1 June may not have become a reality", said Mr Morton.

The 2023 season crop is estimated to be around 5.3Mt of cane, which will be processed across the three Mackay Sugar mills. Included in the crop is a significant volume of cane that could not be harvested and processed in the previous season due to the early-January rain event that put a halt to the 2022 crush. To accommodate any growers whose cane quality was impacted by the extended season, agreement on an extraordinary payment was reached as follows:

For sugar cane that tests less than 75% purity and less than 7 CCS however is more than 6 CCS, an ex-gratia payment of \$12 / tonne cane will be paid. The ex-gratia payment means that such cane will not form part of the relative CCS pool and payment will be made every 2nd month, with final payment being made in the wash-up payment for the season. This agreement covers all cane that has been acknowledged as stand-over cane from the 2022 season, and which is harvested from fields that have been marked as stand-over in the maps recently received from growers.

CANEGROWERS Mackay Area Committee Chairman Joseph Borg said it was encouraging to see Mackay Sugar acknowledge this risk.

"As has been communicated previously, it was disappointing to both growers and Mackay Sugar that last season ended up with a significant volume of unharvested and unprocessed cane," he said.

"This was not only a lost opportunity for all of us last season, we also know that this cane carries the risk of falling below the agreed quality standards once it's processed."



When asked to comment, Stephen Fordyce (ACFA) explained his support for the decision, “Last season we worked together to support growers as they continued harvesting and delivering as much cane as possible to the mills,” he said.

“Despite best efforts, many growers were unable to deliver all their cane before weather stopped the season, so the current initiative provides financial support whilst taking the current market conditions into account,” he explained.

“Furthermore, considering market conditions that continue to provide record high sugar prices, it is even more important for growers to keep doing what they do best – providing a clean quality product to the mills to enable the largest sugar make possible”

The initial CCS level for Cane Pay advances for the start of the season was also discussed. Indications from the first maturity trial, as well as the view that stand-over cane presents a risk of low CCS, has led to a starting level of 12 CCS. As per usual practice, the CCS level will be adjusted throughout the season in line with actual CCS development.

As always, the start of the 2023 crushing season is subject to successful steam trials across all mills, which will be conducted mid-May and based on the estimated volume of cane, the season is forecast to last until the end of November.

“I would like to acknowledge both ACFA and CANEGROWERS Mackay for their collaboration throughout last season and now. It is important that we continue to look for and develop mutually beneficial outcomes for our local sugar cane farming community and the industry,” said Jannik Olejas CEO Mackay Sugar.

“Our industry is a strong and dedicated, one and over the years we have shown – as we do now – that adaptability, responsibility and resilience is part of what makes us unique. It is not without reason that Mackay is known as “the Sugar City,” he said.

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