

# EPWP won't be hobbled

THE ARTICLE published in The Star on March 7 on the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) and the recent Nedlac agreement on a national minimum wage (NMW) had a misleading headline: "Minimum wage hobbles expanded public works programme".

Although I'm correctly quoted in the body of the story, the headline gives the unfortunate impression that I don't fully support the important advance made in the NMW agreement.

The Minister of Public Works, Thulas Nxesi and I have been participating in the Nedlac NMW process. Together with the rest of the government delegation we have saluted all Nedlac partners for this historic milestone agreement.

Government's position on EPWP participants, however, is that they should be excluded from the NMW agreement. These are not workers competing with others on the labour market. They are drawn from the 6.9 million unemployed South Africans.

The EPWP seeks to partially close a massive gap in our social security system, in which those who are able-bodied, who are over 18 and under 60 years, but who are unemployed are otherwise simply not covered by any solidarity income support.

The current sectoral determination for EPWP at R83.59 enables us to reach nearly 1 million unemployed South Africans each year through work opportunities.

Moreover, the exposure of the radically unemployed into the world of work through the EPWP demonstrably creates pathways into more sustainable livelihoods for the majority of participants.

Stats SA surveys over the past five years show that about 65% of participants go to formal or temporary employment, or self-employment, while a further 14% go for further vocational training. The NMW agreement will not hobble the EPWP. EPWP wage rates are a separate matter, needing to be set much like social grant allocations with a view to maximising exclusivity.

**Jeremy Cronin**

Deputy Minister Public Works