

Wednesday, January 20, 2010

Media Release

MUA Stop Work at Esperance Port

The Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) has notified Esperance Ports that its members intend to stop work for 48 hours from 5am on Sunday, January 24, 2010, and return to work on Tuesday, January 26, at 5am.

The dispute concerns negotiations for a new enterprise bargaining agreement (EBA) with Esperance Ports' operational employees.

The MUA members met on January 6 and voted to take industrial action. Under Federal industrial laws the union is required to give the Port three working days notice before stopping work.

The action was decided upon by the MUA and its members as part of the negotiating process to press the Port to keep the existing shift rosters rather than move to more desirable working practices that more closely meet the needs of the Port and its customers and are in line with other ports around Australia.

Acting Port CEO Dr Devinder Grewal said the offer of a 13.5 percent pay rise over three years put to the MUA by the Port as part of the new EBA was very reasonable, particularly in view of the difficult financial position the Port has experienced over the past 12 months.

“Esperance Ports has made concerted efforts to bring the negotiations for a new agreement to a successful conclusion and will continue negotiations in the hope of reaching an agreement,” Dr Grewal said.

“The Port is looking for more flexible work arrangements to enable effective management of peak activities, which is required by the Port's customers and is available at other Ports throughout Australia.

“To meet those needs the Port needs to have flexibility in structuring its operating practices to manage this demand.

“Both the Port and our employees want more certainty in the scheduling of labour, and the Port believes this can be achieved through negotiations with the parties bargaining in good faith.”

Dr Grewal said the Port acknowledged the right of the workforce to withhold its services if it feels aggrieved, but was disappointed that an agreement on a new enterprise agreement had not been reached at this time.

He said the stop work was at a bad time for the Port as it was an extremely busy time with shipping and maintenance.

“Other than an emergency situation, all vessel loading, loading and unloading operations, the handling of iron ore trains and maintenance work will cease during the stoppage,” Dr Grewal said.

“The industrial action will potentially impact on employment across other sections of the regional economy that move goods in or out of the Port.

“The Port can ill-afford to raise anxiety among its customers or unease among its workforce considering it had an operating loss of more than \$3 million last financial year,” he said.

“During the economic downturn the Port made a conscious decision to retain the services of its entire workforce despite losing BHP Billiton business following the closure of the Ravensthorpe nickel mine.

“While employees who voluntarily left the Port were not replaced, it is disappointing that a new rostering arrangement has not been negotiated in spite of our efforts.”

Dr Grewal said that the Port would continue to negotiate with the workforce to find common ground and workable solutions to resolve the outstanding matters.

He said he believed that this could be achieved if everyone worked together in good faith.

Ends

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