The Maritime Union of Australia Queensland Branch

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QLD Gov urged to intervene as Cairns jobs slashed, work outsourced to Indonesia

The Queensland Government is being urged to intervene following revelations that Cairns-based shipping provider Sea Swift — purchased last year for $300 million by the Queensland Investment Corporation — was slashing jobs and outsourcing maintenance work to Indonesia.

The Maritime Union of Australia said it was unacceptable that a major local employer indirectly owned by the Queensland public through QIC was using the current COVID-19 health crisis to make skilled workers forcibly redundant while sending their work overseas.

The union highlighted the case of a Sea Swift vessel which was docked in Batam, Indonesia, last December to undergo a refit. When Australian seafarers arrived to sail it back to Queensland, they refused to depart port, describing it as being uninhabitable and not safe to go to sea.

MUA Queensland Assistant Branch Secretary Paul Gallagher said workers at the company were demanding action from the Queensland Government and QIC.

“The hands-off approach by the Queensland Government and QIC while their wholly-owned business is slashing jobs and outsourcing work to third world countries is simply unacceptable,” Mr Gallagher said.

“We need urgent leadership from QIC and the State Government to ensure this business owned by Queensland taxpayers acts in an ethical and socially responsible manner.

“The fact is that just months after QIC bought Sea Swift, the company sent a vessel to Indonesia to undergo a refit — work that should have been done locally at the Tropical Reef Shipyard in Cairns.

“Now, under the cover of the COVID-19 health crisis, Sea Swift has slashed 15 per cent of the skilled workers in their Cairns engineering department.”

Mr Gallagher said Sea Swift executives had led an anti-union and anti-worker culture at the business, which was linked to the recent outsourcing and job cuts.

“Sea Swift’s anti-union and anti-worker culture has been clearly demonstrated by their refusal for five years to allow officials their basic legal right to board vessels and speak to union members,” he said.

“The company has also spent hundreds of thousands of dollars in legal fees tying up their industrial agreement in a complicated legal stalemate in the Fair Work Commission. The result is that they continue to operate under what is known as a ‘zombie’ enterprise agreement: one that is basically dead, has very little chance of getting legitimised, but still lives on.

“Five years ago, when the MUA fought for and won the right to have the agreement measured by the Seagoing Industry Award 2010, the company agreed to negotiate a new agreement, but since then they have refused to finalise it.

“Their aim throughout these years of dispute has been to achieve an outcome where they can pay local workers below the seagoing award.

“Sea Swift also refused to support a union initiative to create secure jobs for First Nations people in the far north through the inclusion of an Indigenous employment clause.

“With Queensland taxpayers investing millions into this business through the QIC, they would rightly expect this business to support local jobs and treat workers with respect, which is why QIC and the State Government must take immediate action.”

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