



# MUA looks to expand battle with Chevron

**Julie-anne Sprague**

The Maritime Union of Australia is considering legal action against US oil and gas giant Chevron, which it argues is breaching its obligations under a state agreement to use local workers for its massive Gorgon project.

The MUA, which is embroiled in a bitter dispute with Chevron, will also ask the West Australian parliament to probe its employment practices.

MUA state secretary **Christy Cain** said Chevron favoured foreign workers and described Barrow Island – where the company is constructing its \$US54 billion (\$64 billion) liquefied natural gas project – as Guantanamo Bay.

“Chevron wants to bring in foreign crews at the expense of local workers,” Mr Cain said. “We are looking at whether we can take them to court.”

The union will deliver a petition to parliament next month, calling for an investigation into whether Chevron has complied with section 15 of its operating agreement with state government.

The agreement, struck with Labor in 2003, required Chevron to use labour in WA or Australia unless it demonstrated it was not reasonable or economically practicable to do so.

The petition, released a fortnight ago, has received 2000 signatures.

The union claims it has a list of 600 to 700 able seafarers available to take jobs on the Gorgon project but Chevron’s sub-contractors are instead using vessels with foreign crews.

A Chevron spokesman said the company would “always consider, and where possible, give preference to the use of Australian labour, services and materials when price, quality, delivery

and service are equal to or better than other alternatives”.

The union is embroiled in a long-running dispute with more than 20 vessel operators that employ offshore workers including cooks, laundry hands and stewards.

The union says the workers earn, on average, \$150,000 a year, including entitlements. It wants to improve wages, rosters and ensure vessels are operated with locally trained crews.

The Australian Mines and Metals Association, representing vessel operators, says workers earn on average between \$183,000 and \$247,000. Some can earn as much as \$400,000 a year.

Mr Cain said the union was unaware of any worker earning \$400,000 a year, which was only possible if every single entitlement was secured under the enterprise agreement.

Chevron does not directly employ the offshore vessel workers but Mr Cain said the company was responsible for ensuring sub-contractors met the obligations of the Gorgon Gas Processing and Infrastructure Project Agreement.

Chevron is suing the MUA for \$20 million in damages over what it says was unlawful industrial action in 2012. Chevron Australia managing director Roy Krzywosinski has said rising labour costs hindered competitiveness and would cost jobs.

Mr Cain said: “When you go into negotiations for wage increases you negotiate to the best of your ability for your members. That’s what we did.”

The MUA was seeking a 22 per cent pay increase over four years but says it will agree to a 16.5 per cent increase offered by AMMA.