



# Local laws to rule the seas

**Kirsty Needham**  
Workplace Reporter

THE Federal Government has revealed it plans to extend the new Fair Work Act, and minimum wage standards, to foreign crews working on foreign ships in Australian waters.

The Maritime Union's national secretary, Paddy Crumlin, said yesterday the move was a way to "overcome the gross exploitation of foreign crews on many international ships".

But the mining industry said it would increase the risk of bottlenecks as crews on foreign vessels with permits to operate on domestic routes would now be able to join strike action.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, has advised the Australian Industrial Relations Commission (AIRC) that she intends to apply the workplace law to foreign ships employing foreign crews "on permit ships engaging in the coastal trade".

Mr Crumlin said this would end the inhumane treatment of foreign crews, who had gone unpaid in some recent cases in Newcastle and Geraldton.

"No other domestic industry is permitted to use foreign labour paid at the rate applying in the country of origin of the workforce, and we believe nor should those industries that rely on shipping cargoes around the Australian coast," he said.

Steve Knott, chief executive of the Australian Mines and Metals Association, said the resources industry had been taken by surprise by the move and it was concerned at the potential for wide strikes.

"You could have foreign crews worded-up when they come into Australian waters and participating in protected industrial action," he said. The shipping industry also said the move could increase labour costs for vessels, which could be passed on to Australian customers.

Under Work Choices, foreign crews were excluded from Australian workplace laws, overturning a High Court ruling in 2003 that found the AIRC had jurisdiction.