

MEDIA RELEASE

6 November, 2014

Maritime Union uses FIFO mental health as smokescreen to strike

AMMA (Australian Mines and Metals Association) – The resource industry employer group

THE Maritime Union of Australia is planning to strike against a major offshore maritime employer in support of roster changes that would actually see its members work more days each year and spend more time away from their families than the existing roster arrangements.

In the 20-month long bargaining period for new EBAs for 22 maritime employers, one of the MUA's many claims has been to change the longstanding rosters of five-weeks on, five-weeks off, to four-weeks on, four-weeks off.

Due to more frequent travelling to-and-from work each year, the MUA's proposed four-week swings would actually see Australia seafarers spend, on average, an additional 10 days away from their families each year than the existing five-week swings.

"It makes no sense that the MUA is resorting to reckless strike action in order to change maritime rosters to arrangements that would see its members spend more time away from their families," says AMMA executive director, Scott Barklamb.

"While AMMA acknowledges and is an active participant in the wider national debate about FIFO rosters and mental health, unfortunately the MUA appears to be using this issue as a smokescreen to deliberately inflict economic harm against an important maritime employer.

"Unlike the rosters that are currently being examined by the WA Parliamentary Inquiry into FIFO mental health, maritime rosters are even-time rosters where for every day they are at sea, employees receive more than a day at home.

"Essentially, these maritime employees earn a package upwards of \$150,000 for working six months of the year. They spend more time at home with their families and receive much greater remuneration and leave entitlements than almost any other occupation in our broader community.

"The maritime industry also actively assists and supports the wellbeing of all those away from their families at sea with many wellbeing programs and initiatives in place."

It should also be noted that the existing five-week 'swings' are critically important to servicing Australia's offshore LNG projects and thus ensuring the viability of the local oil and gas industry.

Farstad Shipping, the target of the MUA's latest strikes, estimates the MUA's roster claim would cost each vessel around \$120,000 in extra 'dead days' (days not performing contract work) and travel costs alone. Factoring in indirect costs, AMMA estimates the true impact to the offshore resource sector is around \$400,000 per ship, per year.

"Australia's offshore resource sector, which is worth \$170 billion and employs over 70,000 people in our country, can't afford these unnecessary cost and competitive pressures," Mr Barklamb says.

"The MUA's opportunistic attempts to hold our industry to ransom have been going on for too long. It's time the union puts the best interests of maritime employees above its own industrial agendas, and got serious about reaching a responsible deal and securing its members a fair pay rise.

"If the union continues to pursue strike action in support of its unsustainable claims, it seriously risks the long-term viability of Australia's offshore maritime sector and Australian seafaring jobs."

MEDIA: Tom Reid, AMMA Media Manager, 0419 153 407 or Tom.Reid@amma.org.au.