

**MARITIME UNION OF AUSTRALIA**

*Statement*

**HON KYLE MCGINN (Mining and Pastoral)** [5.50 pm]: I rise today to talk about the union that ensured I had support throughout my time in the maritime industry—the Maritime Union of Australia—and its amalgamation with the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union. I am proud to have been a part of the Maritime Union of Australia for the past 10 years. That union ensured that my rights at work were protected and gave me a platform to support social and political issues, and ensured justice, in particular for the disadvantaged. Despite the media talking negatively about the MUA, particularly the WA branch, I stand here to let members know that the organisation I know and love has always acted in the best interest of its membership and ensured that people are treated equally. There were many times when I had been at sea, with no contact with the outside world for weeks on end, and I often found that my employer would find ways to underpay us, neglect its obligations under the enterprise agreement, make us work in a bad safety culture and not supply us with the appropriate safety equipment. On the day that I got in and called my union, every single time it would respond. Every single time it would go in and bat for me and the membership on board the vessel. We always followed the law; if only the employers would.

I mostly enjoyed spending time with people who had been members of the MUA for many years—many of them for 20 or 30 years. The MUA has a history spanning back to 1872, with the Seamen’s Union of Australia. The history of the MUA is a history of many amalgamations, giving members better representation and better benefits right across the board. I took an interest in the 1993 amalgamation from the early days offshore, and spent many a time with members who were there and voted on that amalgamation. The amalgamation was between the SUA and the Waterside Workers’ Federation of Australia. By that time, the SUA had undergone multiple amalgamations with seafarers unions such as the Federated Stewards and Cooks Union of Australia. From what I have heard, that amalgamation was tightly contested but voted on democratically, resulting in the amalgamation going ahead—and, boy, it was needed.

No long after that amalgamation, we saw a disgusting attack on workers’ rights by a twisted businessman Chris Corrigan and the Howard federal government. On 8 April 1998, Patrick Stevedores made the decision to sack its entire workforce around Australia and lock them out the gate. When I say “sack its workforce”, I will paint members a picture. You are at work in a crane, swinging the hook like you have done for many years. You look down out of the crane window and see security thugs, all dressed in black, with balaclavas on their heads and vicious dogs behind them. They then grab your mates and forcefully throw them out the gate. This did not happen in just Fremantle; it happened all around Australia at every single Patrick site. They removed the workers from the workplace and told them, “Bugger off! Your job is finished.” Is that industrial relations? What would members have done? It was lucky these men and women were in an union. It was not just any union; it was the MUA. Those men and women all around this country stood together in the face of injustice. The company and the Howard government failed those workers and tried to break them. The outcome of that dispute has become folklore because the workers won their right to get back on the job and continue to do what they did best—stevedoring.

Now, more than ever, workers are under attack. I have seen the federal Liberal–National government attack, attack and attack maritime workers across the country. One case that sticks in my mind and I will never forget is the MV *Portland* dispute. The MV *Portland* had been running its cargo, domestically, around the Australian coastline. Let me be clear: domestic trade is from point A to point B within Australian waters. That is Australian work. For 27 years that was Australian work. It used to run from Portland, Victoria, to Perth, Kwinana. The Australian crew was forcefully removed from the ship at one o’clock in the morning. Five Australian workers were ripped from their bunks by 30 hired thugs. Then 12 foreign workers were escorted up the gangway and put on the vessel to take those Australian jobs. This vessel continues to trade domestically between Kwinana and Portland. Australian jobs are being taken away. We are talking about Australian workers being removed from their ship to make way for workers who are being extorted on lower wages and who do not have the same safety standards that we have on the job and who are extorted every day. What did the government do to prevent this? Absolutely nothing. It did not stand up for Australian workers; it did not stand up for Australian seafarers.

It is important that workers have unions; without them, how can they fight these types of injustices? The Maritime Union of Australia membership is, as we speak, voting on a historic question—that is, to amalgamate with the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union and the Textile Clothing and Footwear Union of Australia. I believe it is the right of the worker. The worker has a right to affiliate with a union; the worker has a right, as a member of that union, to decide what that union does—whether it affiliates with other unions or stays on its own. That is the right of a union member. It is not the right of the government to become involved in those types of amalgamations, just as it is the right of the membership to decide where it heads. I wish all the members the best of luck with their vote, and I look forward to seeing the outcome.

*House adjourned at 5.58 pm*

