



# MEDIA RELEASE

News from the International Transport Workers' Federation

## **Gladstone: Bulk carrier detained; crew owed \$64,000**

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A Chinese-owned bulk carrier chartered to carry coal to Korea has been detained at the Port of Gladstone by the Australian Maritime Safety Authority after crew members reported they were owed tens of thousands of dollars in unpaid wages.

An inspector from the International Transport Workers' Federation boarded the Panama-flagged Fortune Genius when it docked in Gladstone yesterday (September 5), finding eight crew members from Myanmar who had been underpaid \$8,000 dollars each during the past six months.

The men reported that they had been bullied and forced into working excessive hours for which they weren't paid and asked for assistance with being repatriated to Myanmar due to concerns for their safety if they remained on the vessel.

The ITF also located fraudulent documentation, including two sets of books, which had been used to conceal the wage theft and breaches of the Maritime Labour Convention.

As a result of the ITF inspection AMSA detained the vessel, commencing a full audit of the ship today.

The Fortune Genius is owned by the China-based Marine Fortune Union Company, managed by subsidiary New Fortune Genius Management Limited, and had been chartered by Korean company Five Ocean Corporation to transport coal from Gladstone to Taean.

ITF assistant coordinator Matt Purcell said a growing number of unscrupulous shipping companies were utilising rogue manning agents to exploit vulnerable crew members from Myanmar.

"We carried out an inspection of the Fortune Genius as soon as it docked in Gladstone because the owner has previously been found in breach of the Maritime Labour Convention, which every shipping company in Australian waters needs to adhere to," Mr Purcell said.

"Our inspector was told by the eight crew members from Myanmar that they had been massively underpaid and wanted assistance to leave the vessel and return home.

"Also located were fraudulent documents, including two sets of books, which were allegedly part of a scheme to under pay workers and avoid the provisions of the Maritime Labour Convention.

"These eight men are not only owed in excess of \$8,000 each, there are allegations of bullying, being forced to work excessive hours, and concerns over their safety if they remain on the vessel.

"We will be working with AMSA and the ship owner to ensure they are paid their outstanding wages and repatriated to Myanmar before the vessel is allowed to leave Gladstone.

"AMSA must also investigate the Myanmar-based manning agents responsible for recruiting this crew into employment arrangements that were not only exploitative, but a breach of international law."

ITF president Paddy Crumlin said the incident highlighted the importance of strengthening shipping laws to address the growing use of highly-exploited foreign workers in Australian waters.

“Australia is now almost entirely dependent on foreign flag of convenience vessels, often registered in tax havens and crewed by exploited workers on as little as \$2 per hour,” Mr Crumlin said.

“These vessels supply Australia’s fuel, carry our resources, and move cargo around the coast.

“We are continuing to see a race to the bottom, with the Federal Government sitting on its hands as companies with notoriously poor labour records are allowed to operate in our waters.

“Earlier this year, BHP axed the last two Australian bulk carriers — costing 80 Aussie seafarers their jobs — meaning Australia’s booming exports of iron ore, coal, and gas are now entirely carried by foreign vessels, many of which have a business model based on wage theft and exploitation.

“The detention of this vessel by AMSA is welcome, but the current system relies on the efforts of ITF inspectors and whistle-blowers among ship crews to identify problems, meaning countless cases of exploitation are slipping through the gaps.”

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### ***About the ITF and ITF Inspectorate***

*The International Transport Workers' Federation is a democratic global union federation of 670 transport workers trade unions representing over 20 million workers in 140 countries. The ITF works to improve the lives of transport workers globally, encouraging and organising international solidarity among its network of affiliates. The ITF represents the interests of transport workers' unions in bodies that take decisions affecting jobs, employment conditions or safety in the transport industry.*

*The ITF Inspectorate is a network of 147 Inspectors and Contacts, based in ports all over the world, whose job is to inspect ships calling in their ports to ensure the seafarers have decent pay, working conditions and living conditions on board. They conduct routine inspections and also visit ships on request of the crew. If necessary they assist with actions to protect seafarers' rights as permitted by law.*