



MEDIA RELEASE

News from the International Transport Workers' Federation

Detention of vessel in Port of Brisbane exposes rampant exploitation of foreign seafarers

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Australian authorities have detained a second vessel at a Queensland port after crew members reported being owed more than \$100,000 in unpaid wages, highlighting the rampant exploitation of foreign seafarers transporting goods to and from Australia.

The Hong Kong-flagged bulk carrier MV Xing Jing Hai, owned by Chinese company Ocean Prosperity and managed by Dalian Shipping, was delivering clinker — a material used in the manufacture of cement — to the Port of Brisbane.

The vessel is the second to be detained by the Australian Maritime Safety Authority during the past week after the Panama-flagged MV Fortune Genius was held at the Port of Gladstone last week following an inspection by the International Transport Workers' Federation that found fraudulent documentation, including two sets of books, used to conceal wage theft.

The ITF has also written to AMSA seeking an audit of a third vessel in Port Kembla, the MV Xing Ning Hai, which is owned by the same company as the MV Xing Jing Hai.

That crew have also reported that they have not been paid since June and are owed more than \$100,000 in wages. The vessel has previously been detained in another country for non-payment of wages.

In total, ITF inspectors have identified more than \$250,000 dollars in unpaid wages during audits of vessels at Australian ports during the past week, along with further breaches of the Maritime Labour Convention.

ITF assistant coordinator Matt Purcell said the fact that three almost identical cases of rampant wage theft had been identified in such a short period of time highlighted the serious exploitation taking place in Australia's maritime supply chains.

"These cases show that massive wage theft and the exploitation of vulnerable foreign seafarers are not an anomaly, they are a central feature of the business models of many of the shipping operators carrying freight too and from Australia," Mr Purcell said.

"All these vessels have been contracted to carry goods and materials for major businesses. The Xing Jing Hai is in Brisbane to deliver clinker to Cement Australia, while the Xing Ning Hai is in Port Kembla to carry steel from Bluescope.

"AMSA deserves to be commended for acting swiftly once issues are identified, 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.

"Without the actions of the ITF, not one of these vessels would have been inspected, which is why so many companies think they can get away with rampant exploitation in Australian waters."

ITF president Paddy Crumlin said the cases highlighted the urgent need for stronger shipping laws and more proactive enforcement to counter the growing use of highly-exploited foreign workers in Australian waters.

“In recent decades, the number of Australian-flagged vessels has been slashed, with local seafarers replaced by exploited foreign crews on ships registered in notorious tax havens,” Mr Crumlin said.

“The country 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.

“What these three incidents show is that this isn’t an occasional issue involving one rogue operator, it’s a central part of the business model of a growing number of companies that are contracted to supply Australia’s fuel, carry our resources, and move cargo to and from our ports.

“When BHP axed the last two Australian bulk carriers earlier this year — replacing 80 Aussie seafarers with foreign flag-of-convenience vessels — we warned that the ongoing failure of the Australian Government to tighten shipping laws was sparking a race to the bottom.

“Too many big businesses refuse to take responsibility for the exploitation in their supply chains, which is why we need political leadership to ensure Australia’s maritime trade isn’t built upon the systematic abuse of vulnerable foreign seafarers.”

Media comment: Matt Purcell — 0418 387 966

Further information: Tim Vollmer — 0404 273 313

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.