



**MEDIA ALERT:** Tuesday 11 February, 2020

## **Port of Gladstone: Tug boat maintenance under fire following engine explosions**

Maritime workers have blown the whistle on a series of engine explosions on tug boats at the Port of Gladstone during the past six months, accusing exclusive towage services provider Smit Lamnalco of putting safety at risk by outsourcing maintenance to a business without any marine qualifications.

Workers held a protest outside the multinational company's Gladstone office this morning to highlight their concerns following three engine explosions on board the company's fleet of 12 tugs, with the damage on each occasion so severe the engine needed to be replaced. In each case, an explosion blew the con rod out of the engine, caused oil spills in the engine room and set off fire alarms.

The Maritime Union of Australia said local marine pilots had recorded a long list of serious incidents involving the tug boats, including engine failures, winch failures, steering failures, and issues with fire alarms. Three of the vessels are also not firefighting compliant, meaning they are unable to be the standby vessel for LNG tankers.

The union said inspectors from the Australian Maritime Safety Authority had now instructed Smit Lamnalco to overhaul all caterpillar engines on their tugs within 3 months following the engine failures.

"In less than six months, three tugs out of a fleet of 11 vessels have had explosions resulting in catastrophic damage to the engine, leaving tug boats out of service for months at a time," MUA Queensland Branch Deputy Secretary Jason Miners said.

"These incidents have resulted in a serious shortage of tugs, with one of the vessels currently in Brisbane getting new engines, while another is in dry dock in Papua New Guinea for repairs.

"To cover the shortfall, the company has brought in the 26-year-old SL Cook, despite this vessel only having a 57 tonne bollard pull, which is far less than the Port of Gladstone requirement of a minimum 70 tonne bollard pull.

"It is also alarming that three of the tugs at a major LNG export port are not firefighting compliant, meaning they are unable to act as standby vessels for LNG bulk carriers."

Mr Miners said workers were highlighting these major incidents in an effort to force urgent action on the serious threats to their health and safety at the Port of Gladstone.

"Smit Lamnalco is putting safety at risk with their reckless attempts to cut wages and conditions at the port, including by outsourcing maintenance work on the tug engines to a contractor without any marine qualifications," he said.

"The company has also been imposing unsafe workloads for employees, with shifts that require workers to be on call for 24 hours straight.

"When workers raised safety concerns about the 24 hour shifts, and asked them to instead be split into two 12 hour shifts, the company threatened to halve their pay.

"The families of many of these tug crews are increasingly concerned that the health and safety of their loved ones are being put at risk by the recklessness of this multinational company.

“The union is urging the the Port of Gladstone and the QLD Government to intervene and ensure this foreign company stops cutting corners with safety and maintenance.

“It is well known that the exclusive towage contract for the port is a lucrative one, but money should not be allowed to compromise the safety of Gladstone workers, and this company should not be able to strip away essential rights and conditions for the sake of an extra dollar.”

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