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Melbourne: Wharfies stood down after refusing to unload ship in breach of 14-day quarantine

Wharfies have been stood down after refusing to unload a container vessel at the DP World terminal in Melbourne last night on safety grounds, identifying it as a risk to workers and the community. The vessel docked in breach of the Federal Government's 14-day coronavirus quarantine period.

The Maritime Union of Australia said wharfies understood their important role during the current crisis, but allowing the container vessel XIN DA LIAN to breach the coronavirus quarantine period was simply too great a risk.

The union is also calling for a suite of measures to be cooperatively implemented to protect workers and the community and to keep the supply chains operating.

MUA Assistant National Secretary Warren Smith said: "The largest cluster of COVID-19 cases in Australia — which has already claimed several lives and caused hundreds of illnesses — was the result of inadequate measures put in place for the arrival of ships. What's the difference with this ship?

"Wharfies don't want to see a repeat of that blunder on the waterfront, but we still see ships allowed to dock inside of quarantine periods in breach of Australian Government Department of Health guidelines.

"An outbreak of COVID-19 on the waterfront would have a devastating impact on Australia's supply chain given 98 per cent of imports arrive by sea, disrupting the waterfront and stopping vital medical supplies, food, and household goods.

"It is vital we do everything possible to protect workers, including testing, physical distancing measures on the job, strong hygiene, cleaning, PPE and every other level of support available.

"It is irresponsible not to take the strongest measures to protect the workforce which is providing basic needs for the community."

Mr Smith said the union had been working with employers to put in place a framework based on current health advice to protect workers and ensure the resilience of maritime supply chains.

"The employers as an industry have refused to engage with the union, instead going it alone and looking to opportunistically enact essential services legislation," he said.

"The MUA has been demanding improvements to biosecurity measures since January, and we will continue to fight for strict enforcement of quarantine periods, more proactive biosecurity measures, and testing for workers and crew of international vessels arriving in Australian ports and support for sick crew members."

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Department of Health COVID-19 information for the marine industry:

https://www.mua.org.au/sites/mua.org.au/files/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-marine-industry_1.pdf