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Darwin: Three foreign vessels to dock in breach of coronavirus quarantine

Three container ships that departed foreign ports in recent days are due to dock in Darwin this week, despite failing to undertake the 14 day coronavirus quarantine period, posing a clear health risk to workers and the community.

Singapore-flagged KOTA HARUM, which departed Hong Kong on March 25, will dock in Darwin tomorrow morning (April 3) after just eight days at sea. The Cyprus-flagged ANTUNG is also due to arrive on Friday after visiting Indonesia on March 28 and East Timor on April 1. The Liberia-flagged ANL DILI TRADER, which departed Singapore on March 25, is due to dock on Saturday.

These arrivals, in the most extreme case just two days after departing a foreign port, follow the arrival of the Chinese container vessel XIN DA LIAN in Melbourne. Wharfies were stood down after refusing to unload that ship because it had failed to complete a 14-day quarantine period after leaving Taiwan on March 19.

Commercial vessels continue to dock in Australian ports without crew members undertaking 14 days isolation — as is required by all other travellers — despite clear COVID-19 guidelines to the maritime industry from the Health Department that all vessels should undertake it if arriving from another country.

The Maritime Union of Australia said wharfies understood their important role during the current pandemic, but refused to stand by while foreign vessels were allowed to breach essential measures aimed at preventing the spread of COVID-19 in the community.

“We already know that a failure to enforce biosecurity measures on cruise ships has led to the largest cluster of COVID-19 cases in Australia, causing several deaths and hundreds of illnesses,” MUA National Secretary Paddy Crumlin said.

“The arrival of these three vessels — in the most extreme case less than two days after being in a foreign port — threatens to repeat that debacle by exposing local workers, and through them the broader community, to another outbreak.

“It is outrageous that at a time when people are being told to stay in their homes, to not even take their kids to the park, that the Australian Government is continuing to allow foreign vessels to unload in our ports without undertaking a 14 day quarantine period.

“Wharfies are simply demanding that the Health Department’s guidelines be enforced to prevent the spread of coronavirus on the waterfront, which means ensuring all vessels undertake a 14 day isolation period after leaving their last foreign port before docking in Australia.

“If there is a COVID-19 outbreak on the waterfront, it could have devastating impacts, not only to the health of workers, but on the supply chains that provide 98 per cent of Australia’s imports, including medical supplies, food, and household goods.

“That is why the union developed a maritime industry framework based on expert health advice and international best practice, but some stevedores are refusing to meet or implement those measures, instead resorting to intimidation and threats to force unsafe practices on workers.”

MUA Northern Territory Deputy Branch Secretary, and National Indigenous Officer, Thomas Mayor said the failure to quarantine vessels arriving in Darwin and other ports close to Indigenous communities could have devastating consequences.

“Remote Indigenous communities are particularly vulnerable, given the large numbers of people with chronic health conditions, which is why the Northern Territory cannot relax strict measures to prevent an outbreak of COVID-19 at the port,” Mr Mayor said.

“The arrival of these three vessels at Darwin Port, with no quarantine measures, threatens to spread this deadly virus into our community.

“The Australian and Territory Governments should be doing everything possible to prevent the foreseeable risk of coronavirus arriving on commercial vessels, including through the enforcement of strict 14-day quarantine periods, and proactive testing of crew members on international vessels before work commences on them.

“This should be coupled with measures on the wharves that protect local workers, including physical distancing measures, strong hygiene, cleaning, and appropriate personal protective equipment.”

Additional information:

Health Department COVID-19 guidelines for the marine industry:

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

COVID-19 Maritime Industry Framework:

<https://www.mua.org.au/news/covid-19-maritime-industry-framework>

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