Are wharfies strikes a return to the bad old days?

“The rolling strikes currently being conducted by the MUA against the general stevedoring operations of Patricks are serious and regrettable” Llew Russell CEO of Shipping Australia said today.

“The Union is seeking a 24% pay increase for the first year and 10% in each of the next two years which would increase the Patrick’s general stevedoring wage bill by around 194% which is simply making Australia uncompetitive internationally and SAL would have thought severely strained the future viability of the company as a whole.

“This is increasing Australia’s unreliability as both an importers and exporters of goods like steel, timber and propellers for wind farms and many other outsized and heavy machinery and so on which is imported into Australia. We have to ask ourselves is this a return to the bad old days?” Mr Russell said.

The issue of permanency being sought by the Union does not seem to reflect the different requirements for different ships such as 60 wharfies required for a pure car carrier and say nine for a break bulk vessel carrying, for example, construction equipment. In addition SAL pointed out that the vessel calls at many of these facilities are erratic and relatively low in volume.

SAL pointed to the fact that is certainly not helping in the provision of much needed items for reconstruction following the floods in South East Queensland, Northern New South Wales and Victoria but SAL urged both parties to resolve their differences as soon as practicable in a way that was realistic in terms of wage increases and promoted increased safety.
“Our members are concerned that up to 160 workers have been on strike since 29 January at Fremantle, Albany and the Australian Marine Complex in Kwinana until yesterday. This follows rolling strikes at Webb Dock East in Melbourne.

“The Union has complained that after seven months of negotiation that Patrick was yet to make an offer for their enterprise based agreements but we agree it was not appropriate to do so while these rolling strikes are in place and notifications of further strikes are still currently, as we understand it, being received by Patrick” he said.

Patrick has been reported as saying it was actively participating in the Commonwealth’s Stevedoring Advisory Group which is considering the regulatory safety and training framework for this part of the industry and Patrick has also said that it has repeated the offer to increase permanency at most worksites but the Union had refused the offers.

**Editor’s note**

For more information contact Llew Russell on 0414 958 247 or 02 9266 9903.