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MEDIA RELEASE

Australia's offshore oil and gas safety standards lag behind our competitors

A new report released today by the ACTU, MUA and AWU has highlighted major safety problems in the offshore oil and gas industry, prompting calls for the Federal Government bring Australian standards in line with international competitors.

The report by the former head of the National Occupational Health and Safety Commission, Tom Fisher, will be released today at the ACTU/Offshore Unions Safety Conference in Perth.

ACTU Assistant Secretary, Michael Borowick, said the Australian Government needs to move quickly to fix inconsistencies that leave offshore workers at risk.

"The offshore oil and gas sector is a hazardous industry and this is exactly why we need to be vigilant to improve safety. Only two months ago, two workers were tragically killed using heavy machinery on the Stena Clyde drilling rig off the Victorian coast," Mr Borowick said.

"Compared to onshore industries, offshore workers find it extremely difficult to have representatives such as unions visit them onsite and this caused unacceptable delays for the Stena Clyde workers to receive support they needed from their union and for the site to be properly inspected by the workers' representatives."

MUA National Secretary, Paddy Crumlin, said the National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environmental Management Authority (NOPSEMA) largely excluded workers and their representatives such as unions from providing valuable input into safety concerns.

"Deaths are too common in this sector and yet there appears to be an abysmal lack of interest from the regulator, NOPSEMA, in working with unions to prevent safety breaches," Mr Crumlin said.

"Both the regulator and the Australian Government must commit to involving unions in workplace safety matters. Our highest priority is to ensure workers go home the same way they arrive – alive and healthy."

At the conference today, unions will press for an end to jurisdictional confusion about the offshore sector. The Navigation Act has been dis-applied from offshore facilities, creating confusion as to what exactly constitutes a ship and therefore which regulator gets involved. There are also differences between international, intrastate and interstate operations, making offshore safety a minefield to navigate.

AWU Assistant National Secretary, Scott McDine, said the conference would call for the Australian Government to urgently amend the offshore safety legislation in consultation with stakeholders and introduce it into Parliament as a matter of priority.

"The uncertainties in the application of laws and the deficiencies in the current offshore safety system need to be fixed immediately," Mr McDine said.

"This report highlights that the offshore safety legislation needs to be brought into line with standards in the nationally harmonised OH&S laws. Offshore workers should not be treated like second-class citizens – they deserve at least the same degree of workplace protection as everyone else."

The report will be released at 8.10am on Tuesday 13 November at the ACTU/Offshore Unions Safety Conference, Holiday Inn, 778 Hay Street Perth.

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