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Patrick's secret plan for war on the waterfront will sabotage national economy, say unions

Patrick Stevedores' hardline refusal to negotiate fairly with its workforce will shut down Australia's shipping terminals and sabotage the Australian economy, say unions.

ACTU Secretary Jeff Lawrence said the Maritime Union of Australia's plan to take legally-protected industrial action at Australia's major ports had only occurred as a result of Patrick's refusal to engage in genuine negotiations.

"And now we know why. Patrick's agenda had been exposed thanks to an accidental phone message warning the company plans to lock out workers for taking legal and limited action," Mr Lawrence said.

"Like all workers, wharfies are under the pump from rising costs of living.

"This week's work bans would not even occur if Patrick had agreed to negotiate fairly with the Maritime Union of Australia on behalf of its workforce.

"Instead of talking to its workers, Patrick would prefer to lock them out – all the while masquerading in the media as the victim.

"In reality, Patrick appears to want a fight to return it to the dark days of 1998 waterfront dispute, when workers' rights were savaged by the Howard government.

"Patrick's commentary on the MUA's plan for legally protected, limited industrial action was based on a hyperbolic scare campaign to turn the public against workers who merely want a fair go in the face the of ever-rising costs of living, and threats to their long-term job security.

"Today it has been revealed that Patrick is planning a month-long lock out of its workers, which would stop the Australian economy in its tracks.

"If the national shipping industry lobby group wants to know why 13 years of peace on the waterfront is under threat, it need go no further than the phone message left by Patrick's chief negotiator. Patrick should cease the battle talk now and agree to negotiate in good faith."

Mr Lawrence said the MUA's action would be limited to overtime and transfers, with no closures of the ports as a result.

"The only threat to close the ports is from Patrick's plan to lock out its workforce," he said.

"We call on Patrick to stop this game right now and treat its workers with the dignity they deserve.

"This is 2011, not 1998. The MUA has attempted to negotiate with Patrick and has revised several of its claims, yet the company is refusing to bargain because it is spoiling for a fight.

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