

Wednesday, 12 January 2022

Supplier of meat products to major supermarket chain Woolworths forces workers to work while infectious with Covid virus

Teys Australia is forcing workers to report for duty at one of its South Australian abattoirs even though they have tested positive for Covid and are actively infectious with virus.

Teys is forcing workers to wear special yellow hairnets as a sign of their Covid status.

Teys Australia is the nation's second largest meat processing company and is a supplier to major supermarket chain Woolworths.

Teys is 50 per cent owned by Cargill, the world's largest Agribusiness. The devastating impacts of forcing meat processing workers to work while Covid positive has already been witnessed at other Cargill facilities throughout the world.

The ACTU is calling on the Prime Minister to rule out workers being forced to work while COVID positive, abandon any plans to water down OHS laws at National Cabinet on Thursday, and instead deliver free and accessible Rapid Antigen Tests to all Australians.

Quotes attributable to ACTU President Michele O'Neil

"Teys Australia's behaviour in forcing abattoir workers to keep coming into work even when they are infected with the Covid virus is dangerous and disgraceful.

"Anybody who is infectious with the virus should be isolating at home, to keep themselves their coworkers and the entire community safe. This is what governments, both State and Federal, have been telling us now for **two years**.

"Teys is putting the profits of their business over the safety of their workforce and the entire community. Teys workers were forced to work while symptomatic which has caused a major COVID outbreak at the site.

"It appears that SA Health has rewarded this illegal activity by being complicit in the company's moves to force COVID positive workers to continue to work. Workers weren't asked their opinion and their union wasn't consulted. It's as if Teys thinks their workers don't matter.

"We are concerned that this is unsafe, reckless and in breach of OHS laws. This action at the Teys abattoir suggests that the Prime Minister's push for weakening of OHS laws is happening at the request of big business and that, if Mr Morrison's push is successful, it will seriously risk the health and safety of all Australian workers and the broader community.

"When Scott Morrison says Australians need to 'learn to live with this virus' is this what he's talking about, forcing Australians to go into work while sick with Covid?"

“The Prime Minister’s stubborn refusal to meet with unions to address the urgent need to keep essential workers safe is a very bad sign for working people. All workers must have access to free and easy to obtain Rapid Antigen Tests, proper PPE like N95 or P2 standard face masks and the safety net of Paid Pandemic Leave.

“The Morrison Government also needs to ensure that workers and business have access to the financial support they need to get through the self-imposed lockdown currently being witnessed throughout Australia, as people stay home to avoid the onslaught of the highly virulent Omicron strain.

“Teys’ decision to force workers to wear yellow hairnets to indicate whether or not they are infected with the Covid virus is offensive. It is an affront to human dignity that is reminiscent of some of the worst behaviours in recent human history. Teys’ failure to appreciate this shows that the company either has no judgement, or no values, or both.

“Abattoir workers have literally kept this country fed during the pandemic. They deserve to be treated with respect and dignity, as do all working people.

“Teys Australia is a supplier to Woolworths. If Woolies knew about this behaviour but chose to turn a blind eye, then they have a lot of explaining to do. When Australians do their weekly grocery shop at Woolies, is this the type of product they know they are buying, meat produced by workers forced to work while infected with COVID?

“Scott Morrison must immediately rule out workers being forced to work while infected with COVID and abandon plans to water down OH&S laws when National Cabinet meets.”

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