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POLITICS FEDERAL INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

## Morrison takes aim at maritime union over Sydney port dispute

By **Rob Harris**

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Prime Minister Scott Morrison has accused the militant union at the heart of Sydney's waterfront dispute of "holding the country to ransom" as its industrial action at Port Botany causes major delays to farm exports.

Farmers throughout NSW are holding out for further breakthroughs in the dispute that threatens to hold back any post-drought boom for regional economies from increased global export markets.



Prime Minister Scott Morrison took aim at the "militant" Maritime Union of Australia over the Sydney port dispute. GETTY IMAGES

Speaking in Adelaide on Saturday, Mr Morrison took aim at the Maritime Union of Australia which has hit the port with stoppages, go-slows and overtime and upgrade bans in an employment row that has affected stevedores Patrick, Hutchison and DP World.

"At a time when we are in a COVID national recession, the worst elements of the union movement and the militancy of the MUA is on display," Mr Morrison told Liberal Party members at the party's South Australian conference.

"They're not picking a fight with the government. They're picking a fight with farmers. They're picking a fight with Australians who just want to get household goods into their home."

The National Farmers' Federation savaged the industrial action by wharfies on Friday which is holding up ships in and out of Sydney, delaying farm exports such as beef, sheepmeat, pork and grain and limiting imports such as machinery and chemicals.

Sydney is the third-largest port for beef exports and second for pork and sheepmeat and plays a critical role in containerised grain and cotton exports.

Mr Morrison said at a time when Australians had been tightening their belts and looking after each other, the MUA "just wants to look after itself".

"I'm so disappointed. It's not anger. It's just disappointing," he said. "There are other elements of the union movement who are seeking to do the right thing. I commend them for it."

The federal government is in ongoing negotiations to overhaul outdated workplace laws and established five working groups earlier this year with unions, led by the ACTU, and employer bodies to help the nation recover from the pandemic.

A breakthrough in negotiations on Friday between the union and DP World, the nation's largest container terminal operator, has raised hopes protected industrial action still underway at the Patrick and Hutchison docks can be resolved.

Mr Morrison said "militancy and selfishness" at a time of great national crisis must be denounced.

"That is not the future direction of this country," he said. "That is not the path we want to go down. And I think it is incumbent on the union movement to call this out."

MUA national secretary Paddy Crumlin said the only industrial action that had occurred at the Patrick container terminal had been a single four hour-stoppage, along with bans on working excessive hours.

The union argues its limited action could not have caused the massive delays, instead pointing the finger at mismanagement.

Mr Crumlin said the MUA had offered to suspend all industrial action at Patrick terminals, but the company rejected that offer.

"We are committed to delivering increased and demonstrated best practice productivity on the



waterfront, but only as part of a social contract with the workforce that delivers improved conditions and a shorter working week," he said.

"We accept our critical importance within the supply chain and to the community, however, after lengthy negotiations the slight industrial urging to the employers to get on and finalise these agreements is legitimate."



Maritime Union of Australia national secretary Paddy Crumlin speaks at a Labor Party conference in 2018. ALEX ELLINGHAUSEN



### Rob Harris



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