

Infrastructure

Nationwide port strikes threaten Christmas

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Port operator Patrick says wharf strikes could disrupt goods coming into Australia for Christmas. Credit: AAP

Strikes planned at ports across Australia threaten to cripple imports ahead of Christmas.

The Maritime Union of Australia has launched industrial action at Patrick Terminals sites in Brisbane, Fremantle, Melbourne and Sydney, in what the shipping container terminal operator has described as “bewildering”.

Patrick Terminals CEO Michael Jovic says the company has been negotiating with the union since February 2020 and has held nearly 70 meetings to finalise a new enterprise agreement.

They have offered the union a 2.5 per cent annual pay increase for members over four years.

“We have bargained with the MUA for over 19 months and provided a very generous pay increase, guaranteed no redundancies and provided a commitment to preserving jobs,” he said in a statement on Monday.

“They clearly have no intention of reaching a deal. They just want to cause maximum damage to the company and the economy.”

Wharfies plan to strike in Sydney’s Port Botany next weekend and every Monday, Wednesday and Friday in Melbourne for the month of October.

Mr Jovic said the strikes will have ramifications for all Australians in the lead up to Christmas, given more than 40 per cent of all container freight comes through Patrick terminals.

“The MUA’s actions are frankly bewildering. It seems to have completely lost the plot,” he said.

“This blatantly aggressive strike action demonstrates that it has no regard for the suffering of everyday Australians who have felt the impact of COVID-19 lockdowns, job losses and restrictions over the past 18 months.

“It seems that the union is trying to starve the Melbourne public of Christmas presents after all that Victorians have gone through ... it is truly mind-boggling.”

The MUA has been contacted for comment.