



MUA 'closer to the Salvation Army'

Merger: The MUA will have deep pockets if it joins with the CFMEU.

Ewin Hannan
Workplace editor

Paddy Crumlin is on the phone, complaining about the Coalition's "bloody industrial jihad" on the union he has led for 16 years, the Maritime Union of Australia.

Crumlin says the portrayal of the MUA as militant lawbreakers is rubbish, that it has been the Abbott and Turnbull governments that have been the aggressors, pursuing policies to undermine the livelihoods of his members.

"When you read the bloody editorials, you would think the MUA was like the hordes of Mongolia," the former surfboard maker told *The Australian Financial Review*.

"We are 14,000 workers working in one of the most productive industries with good social dialogue with stevedoring employers and Australian ship owners.

"When you see some of the guff, the propaganda and spin out there, you would think, and I've said this before, that we are the Comancheros when, in fact, we are closer to the Salvation Army. We are good corporate citizens."

Crumlin will address on Monday hundreds of MUA delegates meeting at Jupiter's casino on the Gold Coast for the union's national conference. The key agenda item will be the MUA's proposed merger with the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union.

By Friday, the delegates will vote on whether to authorise the MUA leadership to start negotiating with the CFMEU. Conditions will be set down.

If they are met, a plebiscite of MUA members will be held to vote on whether to create a combined union that will have an estimated 124,000 members, plus significant assets and resources.

Crumlin, keen to convince his members that the MUA's identity and history will not be swallowed by the CFMEU, says he doubts the plebiscite will be held in 2016, meaning a merger

might not be finalised until 2017.

Both unions, especially the CFMEU, have shown they are prepared to act unlawfully if they deem it necessary.

Employment Minister Michaelia Cash says they show no regard for the economic damage they cause, while industry groups predict the union merger will lead to "double the militancy" through increased levels of industrial action.

Crumlin acknowledges the merger will give the new union the capacity to

take more effective action across supply chains, but he says warnings of outbreaks of unlawful industrial action are "bulls-t" and typical of a "neo-conservative agenda" pursued by the Coalition and the resource sector lobby. "There's nothing sinister about it," he says.

"We are not trying to run some big militant agenda. You have got all the laws. We are surrounded by laws.

"This is about being effective, having workers who want to be in trade unions having social dialogue."

Crumlin says the MUA – formed in 1993 after a merger between the Seamen's Union of Australia and the Waterside Workers Federation – approached the CFMEU to amalgamate. He says a range of policy decisions by the Coalition have made it obvious that the government is trying to "bring down the reputation of the union".

"I come from a generation of seafarers that developed the North-West Shelf, where we delivered continuity of operations and continuous export of LNG since 1988," he says.

"To have these people treat us like a bunch of industrial louts with no regard whatsoever for industrial dialogue, and the fundamentals of ILO [International Labour Organisation] conventions and freedom of association, we had no choice.

"We have determined we want to open negotiations with the CFMEU and, of course, any other unions that want to enter into a restructured trade union movement that can preserve the

identity of individual workers and their proud history, but also be able to have the resources and the capacity to confront that type of political cynicism."

Crumlin emphasises the MUA will

not accept an attempted "takeover" by the 110,000-member CFMEU.

He says the MUA will want to retain its name – "we will not be the CFMEU" – and will seek to operate as a separate division within the merged union, retaining control over its assets and cash reserves.

"We are going to keep our own resources," he says.

"We want to keep our own identity. That doesn't mean we are not going to share in those resources. We could do things more efficiently in many areas, but it's got to be done by agreement.

CFMEU national secretary Michael O'Connor says the CFMEU's existing divisions representing construction, timber, mining and energy workers are each responsible for their own bargaining and campaigns.

"We hope to have a situation where a

new union would have a greater capacity to advance the interests of our members, get them good deals, and better outcomes for their families," he says.

"But we also understand this: whatever outcomes we get, in whatever industry we work, they have got to be sustainable and I think workers have got a pretty good idea of what's sustainable."

University of Adelaide law professor Andrew Stewart says the merger will create a "single new legal entity", presumably giving the MUA access to the greater pool of assets and resources held by the CFMEU.

Stewart says secondary boycott laws will constrain the capacity of the new union's different divisions to pursue lawful action in support of each other.

But he says the merger also raises the prospect of the combined unions having an increased ability to take unlawful industrial action across industries.

"I think the most important question

is going to be does this amalgamation of the unions create a single union with a greater practical capacity to defy the law in their own respective areas of operation at a time when it is highly likely we are going to see increased penalties for industrial action and, at some point, a new regulator in the building and construction industry



and a new regulator for unions generally," he says.

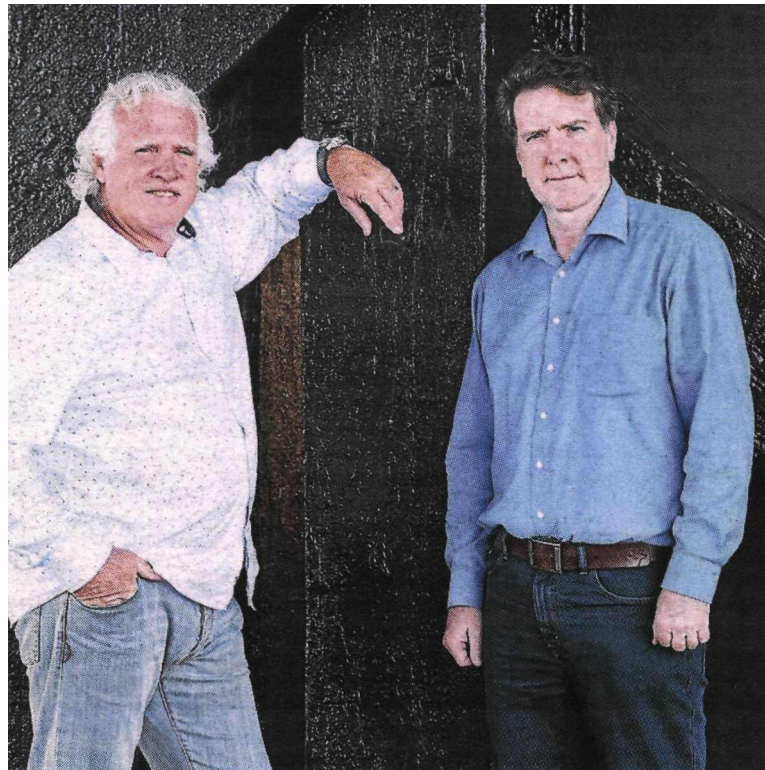
Australian Mines and Metals Association executive director Scott Barklamb says resource employers are concerned by the emergence of a "newly empowered, cashed-up amalgamated union".

"These unions brazenly assert a right to disregard our laws, demonstrating time and again their appetite for causing maximum harm to employers and our economy in pursuit of their outdated workplace relations strategies," he says.

"The planned merger would create a politically powerful organisation with deep pockets."

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Paddy Crumlin, MUA



The MUA's Paddy Crumlin, left, and the CFMEU's Michael O'Connor. Crumlin says "we are good corporate citizens". PHOTO: NICK MOIR