



Wharf workers vote to link arms with CFMEU

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Maritime Union of Australia members gave in-principle support for a merger with the construction union, while employers fearful of a mega-union emerging said union amalgamations should be subject to a legal public-interest test.

Delegates at the union's national conference on the Gold Coast unanimously voted to authorise the union leadership to start merger negotiations with the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union, a move that would combine Australia's most militant union with one of its best funded.

Union members placed a number of conditions on the marriage, including that a final deal be conditional on a plebiscite of the MUA's 14,000 members.

As revealed in *The Australian Financial Review* on Monday, the MUA will consider mergers with a number of big right-wing unions, including the Transport Workers Union and the Australian Workers Union.

The vote set down conditions for the merger with the CFMEU including that the MUA retain its name, its rules and assets.

While the MUA would operate as a separate division of the amalgamated union, the merged entity would work in "mutually agreed areas" including industrial and political campaigning,

organising, legal and research.

MUA national secretary Paddy Crumlin said the unanimous vote – which was brought forward by days – marked a "historic day" for the MUA. "The fact that it was unanimous is an extraordinary achievement," he said.

CFMEU national secretary Michael O'Connor said the vote was a "great result", and predicted it would be supported when the CFMEU national executive meets this week.

Employment Minister Michaelia Cash expressed concerns on Monday about the merger but would not respond to calls by industry groups for union amalgamations to be subject to a public interest test.

"The fact that the two most militant unions in Australia are proposing to merge is extremely concerning," she said. "The potential merger of further unions to cover the majority of transport logistics across Australia should concern all Australians. This represents a major threat to productivity, jobs growth and economic prosperity."

The Australian Industry Group's director of national workplace relations, Stephen Smith, said the merger concerned employers "because both of these unions already have too much power, given the inadequate laws".

"Given that unions are given many rights and powers under Australia's workplace relations system, the com-

munity has a legitimate interest in ensuring that union amalgamations are not against the public interest.

"Consideration needs to be given to whether legislative changes are needed to allow public-interest arguments to be properly dealt with when mergers are planned," Mr Smith said.

Australian Mines and Metals Association executive director Scott Barklamb said "just as businesses pursuing vertical integration are subject to competition considerations, so too should the public interest be taken into account in the structuring of trade unions."

Mr O'Connor said unions abided by existing laws and the government's criticism of the merger was hysterical and not founded in industrial reality.

Mr Crumlin said a public-interest test for union mergers was an "absurd proposition". "The public interest is in the interests of the members of both of those unions."



Maritime Union of Australia members vote on the merger on Monday.