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## Minister Burke should stop masquerading as a union official

*Statement by Steve Knott, CEO, Australian Resources and Energy Employer Association (AREEA)*

Australia has received a welcome six-month reprieve on the rolling stoppages, work bans and strikes inflicted by the militant Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) in our critical tugboat operations.

That said, AREEA is disappointed the Fair Work Commission (FWC) has chosen to suspend the tugboat industrial dispute instead of terminating and dealing with its root cause right away.

This was a case ripe for termination, not suspension.

There are no winners in the suspension outcome. Employees have been denied any opportunity for a pay increase for another six months. For the employer, they must endure another six months of intransigence and militancy from the union before being right back to where they started – staring down the barrel of crippling strike action.

Militant maritime union bosses have had no interest in bargaining in good faith towards a reasonable agreement for three years. What purpose will suspending industrial action for six months provide, aside from allowing a short grace period for the union to shore up its position and plan for greater disruption in the second half of 2023?

Minister Burke has repeatedly made the false argument that his proposed IR Bill will provide a better mechanism for resolving these types of disputes.

This is a blatant misrepresentation of the current laws, as they stand today, that were drafted by the ALP and ACTU.

There is already sufficient scope and powers under the existing Fair Work laws for the tribunal to sort this mess out now.

All the tools were available to the FWC to have them terminate the industrial action, triggering 21-days for parties to reach agreement before the FWC could make a workplace determination.

Minister Burke's blatant falsehoods about his proposed new arbitration laws follow a familiar pattern of spreading misinformation about the impact of his wide-ranging IR Bill. At its very essence, the Bill is only about union power, union revenue and increasing ALP donations.

Under the proposed new laws militant union bosses will be more emboldened to make unreasonable demands on employers and drag out negotiations until the FWC is forced to step in and arbitrate.

The result will be more strike action across the economy, more power to the FWC to set wages and conditions in private sector businesses, and less scope for employers and employees to determine what's best for them and the success of their enterprises.

In the tugboats matter, by focusing solely on the employer lock-out response Minister Burke is being wilfully blind to the outrageous behaviour of the MUA which for several years has dragged down productivity at our ports and impacted all corners of the community.

Minister Burke should stop masquerading as a union official and begin acting like a Minister in support of the national interest.

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