

Port Announcement Sounds Death Knell for over 50 Jobs

Prime Port in Timaru today announced a proposal to axe more than 50 jobs on the waterfront by the end of September, something the Rail and Maritime Transport Union (RMTU) says is a direct result of the lack of a national ports strategy.

'This government isn't interested in an integrated and planned approach to getting our export goods to market and New Zealand workers and businesses are paying the price. Since Maersk and Hamburg Sud announced they were pulling out the Timaru container trade our members have been left wondering about the extent of job losses on the waterfront, today they found out. For us, it's cold comfort to say to Government 'we told you so',' said RMTU General Secretary Wayne Butson.

'The lack of a national ports strategy condemns ports to compete with one another for trade and the losers are Kiwi workers, ratepayers, and local businesses,' he said.

'Timaru District Council invested in their container port and were successful in attracting business in the short term but now the foreign owned shipping companies have left town and the result is workers lose their jobs and exporters pay higher costs to get their goods to market' said Wayne Butson.

'This makes no sense, Timaru's economic hinterland is huge, most of the export traffic that goes over the wharf is produced in the region and the Christchurch earthquake demonstrated the importance of having a contingency in the event of disruption to other South Island ports,' he said.

'Two weeks ago John Key was very happy to visit Timaru to open a swimming pool but he refused to acknowledge port workers faced with being thrown on the scrapheap. He's happy to do the fluffy stuff but dodges the tough issues. We challenge him to come and front up to these port workers with a strategy to protect jobs and business in the heartland of New Zealand, ' said Wayne Butson.

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