

KiwiRail locomotives need to be audited for slave labour

Rail and Maritime Transport Union media release
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The union for rail workers wants assurances new KiwiRail locomotives are not involved in slave labour in China.

Rail and Maritime Transport Union General Secretary Wayne Butson says new information about the Chinese company CRRC using slave labour is a major concern.

Mr Butson says the Government needs to ensure KiwiRail check its suppliers are not engaged in human rights abuses.

KiwiRail was a State Owned Enterprise and any involvement with unethical practices would place both KiwiRail and New Zealand in a compromised position, he says.

CRRC was named in February 2020 by Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) as one of 82 “foreign and Chinese companies potentially directly or indirectly benefiting from the use of Uyghur workers outside Xinjiang through abusive labour transfer programs as recently as 2019”.

KiwiRail recently ordered 10 new diesel locomotives from the company, on top of 63 it has bought since 2009.

The Greater Wellington Regional Council is now investigating whether 98 electric buses it is about to lease were implicated.

CRRC have a massive contract to build 65 metro trains for Melbourne, and Government officials have been called before the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal in fallout from the slave labour issue.

Mr Butson says a statement from KiwiRail that they did not have the skills or experience to carry out human rights assessments was irresponsible.

He says the situation was now a matter of public record and public concern.

“KiwiRail is a large State Owned Enterprise that has the capability – and responsibility – to be across any issues that could damage its reputation or New Zealand’s reputation.”

Mr Butson says it is obvious KiwiRail needed to review its procurement policies, as the DL locomotives had already seen major problems, such as asbestos contamination and poor performance.

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