

VICTORIA

Shipping dispute could leave shelves bare at Christmas

Bare shelves and price hikes are on the cards as a shipping dispute heats up, leaving thousands of containers sitting empty at the Port of Melbourne and shipments 10 days behind schedule.

KIERAN ROONEY AND TOM MINEAR, Herald Sun

Subscriber only | September 29, 2020 6:00am



Shipping containers are behind schedule arriving in Melbourne.

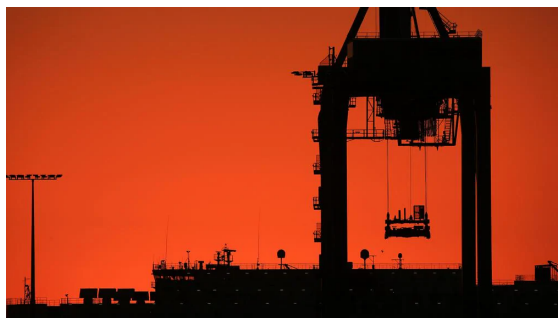
Thousands of shipping containers are days behind schedule at the Port of Melbourne, with industry groups warning of price rises and empty shelves ahead of Christmas.

An ongoing industrial dispute between Patrick and the Maritime Union of Australia, focused mainly at Port Botany in Sydney, has sparked a domino effect for the state's supply chain.

Shippers are now avoiding the area and dumping thousands of extra containers in Melbourne, creating extra costs for businesses and delays for a range of consumer goods.

It's understood Patrick's terminal in Melbourne is 20,000 containers behind schedule, a delay of about 10 days, and this is expected to increase.

Concerns are mounting nationally over major disruptions to farm exports and to imports of vital products such as medicines.



The shipping delay could impact Christmas stocks. Picture: Mark Stewart

Patrick has urgently applied to the Fair Work Commission to end the industrial dispute, with the Federal Government intervening to support their case.

The move could threaten the relationship between the Morrison Government and the union movement as they discuss a new direction for Australia's industrial relations system.

Attorney-General and Industrial Relations Minister Christian Porter on Monday attacked the MUA's push for a 6 per cent pay increase as a "slap in the face" to those out of work.

"Equally concerning is the impact on the supply of critical goods, including vital pharmaceuticals needed to treat acute issues such as cancer, heart disease, cholesterol, and diabetes," he said.

"It is vital that we see a quick resolution to this dispute."



Seagulls Melbourne 07,10.20. Port Melbourne beach.
Picture: Jason Edwards

Paul Zalai, director of the Freight and Trade Alliance, said suppliers in Victoria were already under pressure to keep shelves stocked.

"Demand will increase and costs will increase as Christmas approaches," he said.

"As each day passes the situation worsens and the costs to the consumer continues to rise as does the very real possibility of shortages of imported goods as the peak season approaches.

MUA national secretary Paddy Crumlin said Patrick had deliberately escalated the dispute.

He also disputed claims of massive delays.

"The company rejected the union's offer to roll over the existing workplace agreement, they rejected our offer to suspend all industrial action, and they rejected our attempts to put procedures in place that would ensure no impacts on vital goods like medical supplies," Mr Crumlin said.

"Patrick has been making extraordinary and unfounded claims, which will be exposed for what they are by this legal action."

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