

Rail union calls for strategic rethink on foundry

Media Release Rail & Maritime Transport Union

Monday 2 November 2020

The union representing rail workers says the closure of a Dunedin foundry could be turned around by strategic leadership from industry and Government.

Bradken are closing their foundry operations at the Kiwirail-owned Hillside site at the end of 2020.

Rail and Maritime Transport Union National Secretary Wayne Butson says it would be possible for KiwiRail to step in and set up an in-house production unit.

He says the Union has raised the issue with KiwiRail management and Government.

“Taking back control of the foundry and maintaining employment of highly skilled workers is a shovel ready project that should be a focus of the Government and a state owned enterprise that is the recipient of large influxes of taxpayer funds.”

The closure has been hinted at for months, but was only confirmed by Bradken in mid October.

Bradken purchased the foundry off KiwiRail in 2012 as part of the National Governments closure of Hillside.

“The foundry still produces castings for locally manufactured rolling stock not yet replaced by imported freight wagons, so we don't know where Kiwirail would source these in near future.”

The foundry also produces consumable castings for Tiwai Point smelter which despite likely closure is still operating for an unknown period of time, says Mr Butson.

There would be challenges in a setting up a new foundry operation but they were not insurmountable.

The closure of the plant and loss of its skilled workforce would mean the end of the only large capacity foundry in the South Island and possibly the country.

Mr Butson says there needed to be strategic thinking about maintaining an engineering hub based on rail but also servicing current and future needs for other industries.

He says the lesson of last year from COVID-19 was New Zealand must ensure it is able to produce essential goods and services in a volatile global situation.

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For more information contact:

Rail and Maritime Transport Union National Secretary Wayne Butson on 0274962461