



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **Rail & Maritime Transport Union**

**15 October 2018**

#### **Rail union urges government to keep promise, save electric trains**

The Rail & Maritime Transport Union calls on the government to honour its [campaign pledge](#) of maintaining electric locomotives on the North Island Main Trunk.

Almost a year after the Labour-led government was formed, and despite statements while in opposition from [Labour](#), the [Greens](#) and [NZ First](#), there is deafening silence from the Beehive as KiwiRail prepares to mothball its electric machines in favour of Chinese diesel engines.

Todd Valster, acting RMTU General Secretary, warns that the Labour-affiliate union will raise its concerns loudly at the Party's November conference if required.

"We were thrilled to see Jacinda and the team elected, on a strong platform of protecting workers rights and tackling climate change," says Mr Valster.

"I remember her describing it as the challenge that defines her generation. Well, this is a chance to make that slogan a reality. It's time for a government of action."

15 DL class diesel engines were unloaded onto the Tauranga wharves last week, with KiwiRail intending to deploy them as replacements for the EF class electric locomotives currently in use between Hamilton and Palmerston North.

The Chinese-made diesel engines have previously [been criticised](#) for asbestos contamination and "extraordinarily poor" performance.

They are expected to burn through eight million litres of diesel a year, adding an extra 12,000 tons of pollution to New Zealand's carbon footprint.

Without electric locomotives operating, this may only be the beginning; it is easy to imagine KiwiRail asking why they should maintain an electric-capable section of track, without engines to match.

“KiwiRail haven’t properly maintained the EF engines for years, but it would still cost [only \\$12 million](#) to get them ready for another decade of operation. Compare that to \$35 million for just eight of these diesels,” says Mr Valster.

“Our union has always fought hard to keep secure, well paid jobs in New Zealand, and it’s difficult to see how importing dodgy diesels from China will help with that. For once, the cheapest option is also the greenest and the most forward thinking.”

Since KiwiRail’s diesel plan was first announced in 2016, concerns have been raised by the RMTU, [industry experts](#), and environmental groups such as [Generation Zero](#).

Green co-leader James Shaw [spoke recently](#) of broadening the government’s plans to spend millions in support of electric vehicles.

“Perhaps he should let us know if his opinions on electric locomotives have changed since he was in opposition,” says Mr Valster.

“Labour, the Greens and New Zealand First have promises to keep and a \$5.5 billion dollar budget surplus to keep them with. If the government cares about secure jobs in Palmerston North, Taihape, Taumaranui, Ohakune and the Hutt Valley, if they care about saving our planet, the time to act is now.”

**ENDS**

**For further comment, please contact acting RMTU General Secretary Todd Valster.**

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