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Privatisation warning for Qld Government in Tassie rail buyback

Tasmania's embarrassing buyback of its run-down railway system from a private operator is a stark warning to the Queensland Government against privatising Queensland Rail.

Rail Tram and Bus Union State President Bruce Mackie said today that private rail operator Asciano had stripped bare Tasmania's rail system, lowering safety standards and closing lines before forcing the Tasmanian Government to move this week to buy back the service.

Asciano shocked regular freight customers last week when it announced it would stop rail services in Tasmania from 30 June 2009 because it could not operate at a profit.

The Tasmanian Government then announced on 20 June that it would buy back the rail service for an undisclosed sum, and carry out desperately needed track and rolling stock repairs.

"Asciano bought the rail service in 2004 for about \$40 million, and now the Tasmanian Government has to buy it back, with its rolling stock stripped away, and more than 30 depots and six branch lines closed," Mr Mackie said.

"And currently the main north-south freight line in Tasmania is closed because the private operator doesn't want to spend money on emergency repairs.

"It's a stark message about the future of Queensland Rail if it is privatised," Mr Mackie said.

"The Queensland Government is ignoring hard evidence about the scandalous reduction in services and safety once a solid public-owned asset is given over to big business," he said.

"Multinationals like Asciano will be very keen to get their hands on Queensland Rail."

The RTBU has vowed to fight against the state government's sell-off of rail, ports, roads and forestry assets to balance its budget.

"Privatisation presents a real risk to jobs in regional areas. Many of our regional communities depend on rail for jobs and transport. A private rail operator will corner the market, jack up prices, reduce services and disappear when the going gets tough – just like in Tasmania," Mr Mackie said, "and it will be taxpayers left to pay the railways repair bill."

The RTBU has planned regional community forums next month to highlight the risks of privatisation to Queensland communities.

**For further information or interviews,
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