

ST SHENOUDA COPTIC ORTHODOX MONASTERY (NSW) PROPERTY TRUST BILL 2014**Second Reading**

Mr BRAD HAZZARD (Wakehurst—Attorney General, and Minister for Justice) [6.45 p.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I support the St Shenouda Coptic Orthodox Monastery (NSW) Property Trust Bill 2014. This bill was introduced by Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile on 19 June 2014 in the other place. The bill proposes to create a new Act that will constitute a statutory property trust for the St Shenouda Coptic Orthodox Monastery and incorporate a statutory corporation to hold property on trust for the monastery. The bill mirrors the existing Coptic Orthodox Church (NSW) Property Trust Act 1990, which created a property trust for the Coptic Orthodox Church Diocese of Sydney.

I note that at some point in the near future the Government intends to introduce legislation that will deal more comprehensively with such matters as property being held by the various churches. We will then be able to address some of the issues of consistency and ensure a better framework for the various faiths. This bill was, as I said, introduced by Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile, who has reported to the Government that the St Shenouda Coptic Orthodox Monastery is keen to progress this bill at this time. The Government intends to look at the issues that are contained within this bill and some other related issues in a more comprehensive fashion. The Government is prepared at this time to agree to support the St Shenouda Coptic Orthodox Monastery (NSW) Property Trust Bill to satisfy the immediate needs of the church.

The Coptic Orthodox Church is one of the oldest Christian churches—more than 19 centuries old—and regards itself as a strong defender of the Christian faith. Although fully integrated into the body of the modern Egyptian nation, the Copts have survived as a strong religious entity and pride themselves on their contribution to the Christian world. Whilst the monastery is part of the Coptic Orthodox Church, it is different in terms of congregation size, property holdings and governance structure. The bishop of the monastery is separate from the bishop of the diocese, with each being required to report directly to the Pope in Egypt. The monastery was purchased in 1993 and has since undergone significant transformation with the construction of a church for the monks and congregation, a retreat house, a large workshop; and a number of— [*Quorum called for.*]

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[*The bells having been rung and a quorum having formed, business resumed.*]

The monastery regularly welcomes thousands of parishioners from New South Wales and other parts of Australia. His Grace Bishop Daniel is only the second bishop to be ordained over a Coptic monastery in Sydney. St Shenouda monastery was officially canonised in 2009, and officially recognised by the Holy Synod. St Shenouda monastery is one of the small number of Coptic monasteries outside Egypt that has been canonised. The bill satisfies each of the requirements of the St Shenouda Coptic Orthodox Monastery and addresses issues including: constituting a statutory corporation to hold property on trust for the monastery; making the bishop of the monastery the sole trustee; vesting property in the trust without the need to pay duty; specifying the functions of a statutory corporation, for example, by detailing conditions for the variation of the trust; empowering the trust to act as executive administrator; and the execution of documents. Other details in relation to this bill can be found in the address by Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile in the other place. The bill seeks to establish a property trust structure for the monastery that is very similar to the structure created for a diocese. I commend the bill to the House.