



Legislative Council

Sydney Bethel Union Extension

Amendment Bill Hansard - Extract

20/03/2002

Second Reading

The Hon. MICHAEL EGAN (Treasurer, Minister for State Development, and Vice-President of the Executive Council) [3.55 p.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The purpose of the bill is to authorise the trustees of the Bethel Union to extend their operations beyond the Port of Sydney so that they can assist seafarers visiting any port in New South Wales, to remove the restriction on the type of facilities the trustees can provide to seafarers, and to provide the trustees with an investment power in accordance with the Trustee Act 1925. At the beginning of the nineteenth century a number of Bethel organisations were established in different parts of the world as a lay initiative dedicated to addressing the spiritual welfare of seafarers. Each organisation is independent and has no connection with any other Bethel organisation. The Sydney Bethel Union is a charitable organisation that since 1822 has provided religious and secular instruction and social recreation for seafarers of all nations visiting the Port of Sydney.

In the mid nineteenth century the trustees were given a grant of land upon which to build a chapel and other necessary buildings. The Sydney Bethel Union Extension Act 1908 extended the powers of the trustees and authorised them to erect a Mariner's Church and other related buildings, reading rooms, a lecture hall, a gymnasium, lavatories and such other accommodation as the trustees may think in their discretion is advisable. The 1908 Act also appointed new trustees and vested additional land in the trustees in exchange for some of their land that had been resumed by the Government. The Sydney Bethel Union currently operates a hostel for seamen visiting Sydney. Seamen pay a nominal sum to stay at the hostel.

Shipping movements have altered over the years as more shipping goes in and out of other New South Wales ports. There is reduced demand for the Bethel Union's facilities in Sydney, but it is necessary to provide facilities in other New South Wales ports. The bill will enable the Bethel Union to provide facilities for the religious and secular instruction and social recreation of seafarers throughout New South Wales. In the course of its operations the Bethel Union has received donations and bequests that have been used to finance its operations. The Act does not give the trustees a specific power to invest money and to apply that income for the purposes of the Bethel Union, nor a power to employ people to assist in the running of Bethel Union facilities. The bill provides the trustees with an investment power in accordance with the Trustee Act 1985 and the power to employ people to assist in the running of the facilities.

I turn now to the bill. Items [1], [5], [6], and [8] of schedule 1 amend the Sydney Bethel Union Extension Act 1908 to enable the trustees to extend their operations beyond the Port of Sydney to any port in New South Wales. Items [2] and [3] of schedule 1 amend the Act to enable the trustees to extend the types of facilities they can provide to seafarers. Items [4] and [7] of schedule 1 amend the Act to update outdated language by removing references to "seaman" and replacing them with references to "seafarers". That is not a provision with which I am especially enamoured. Item [5] of schedule 1 inserts sections 8A, 8B and 8C into the Act. Section 8A will give trustees the power to invest money in accordance with the Trustee Act 1925. Section 8B will give trustees the power to employ or otherwise engage people to assist in the operations of the Bethel Union. Section 8C will give trustees the power to make grants to associations, institutions, or bodies of persons engaged in mission work among seafarers. The bill is designed to enable the Bethel Union to better assist seafarers who visit New South Wales ports. I commend the bill to the House.