

## HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

WEDNESDAY MARCH 6<sup>TH</sup> 2015

### THE UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA (MEMBERSHIP OF TRUST) AMENDMENT BILL

*Referred to Select Committee*

**Mr PEDERICK ( Hammond ) ( 15:48 ):** Thank you, Deputy Speaker, and I thank the Attorney for his observations. I rise to speak to the Uniting Church in Australia (Membership of Trust) Amendment Bill and the report of the select committee. I note just a little bit of history. This bill goes back to an extract of the minutes of a Resources Board meeting for the Uniting Church on 5 September 2013, where there was a recommendation for a revision of The Uniting Church in Australia Act 1976-1977 that a review be undertaken of the act and action initiated to amend the act to bring it up to date, noting in particular the need to amend section 11(4). It was agreed to give further consideration to this recommendation and it was given to a certain individual to investigate further.

Obviously, there were some internal investigations done within the hierarchy of the Uniting Church, and that took a little bit of time. I note that on 19 August 2014, the Uniting Church wrote to the Attorney-General in regard to section 11(4), which states that 'No person who has attained the age of seventy years shall be eligible for appointment as a member of the Trust'. That is the main item we are dealing with in amending this act.

The church was concerned that they were losing some very good people in their tenure to serve on the Property Trust of the Uniting Church of Australia. This legislation came to this place and was debated and, subsequently, the select committee was set up with members from either side of the house and advertising for submissions was put out. We had one response, and it was from the Uniting Church, and I will read that response. It reads:

To the Secretary:

We write to you on behalf of the Uniting Church in South Australia in response to your call for submissions on the Select Committee on the Uniting Church in Australia (Membership of Trust) Amendment Bill.

As officers of the Uniting Church in South Australia we fully support the proposed change to the Act relating to the 70 year old clause. I wish to thank the Select Committee for its consideration of the matter and would like to reiterate the desire of the Church to have the amendment made.

Following a review of The Uniting Church in Australia Act 1976-1977 ('the Act'), the Uniting Church in Australia Property Trust (S.A.) ('the Property Trust') agreed to pursue this amendment to the act. For your convenience, please find attached an extract from the minutes reflecting this decision and a copy of the letter sent to the Attorney-General requesting the change to the Act.

The Uniting Church is well aware of the limitations of keeping the Act in its current form. In 2010 the first cohort of baby boomers entered an older age group of 65. In our experience this demographic includes a vibrant, productive and engaged workforce with much to contribute. Within our 300 congregations in South Australia many of our retirees have enjoyed long careers in which they have accumulated diverse skills and experience in professional, business and leadership arenas. Once retired they seek opportunities to contribute to the community in a meaningful way, on a part time or voluntary basis.

It seems clear that legislation that limits an individual's ability to contribute to society based on their age is discriminatory and outdated. In the case of the Uniting Church, the legislation in its current form limits our available Volunteers to serve on the Property Trust. Just recently the Property Trust farewelled two experienced and highly valued members who concluded their tenure on the Trust and would have continued to serve, if not for reaching 70 years of age.

The Uniting Church (S.A.) believes removing the age limitations of the Act will be a step towards recognising the changing needs of Australia's population by creating opportunities for our older people to remain engaged in the community. As well it will better reflect the current thinking of the Uniting Church in respecting people of all ages and valuing volunteers.

Do not hesitate to contact me if you would like to discuss the matter further—

etc., and it was signed off by Deidre Palmer, Moderator of the Uniting Church in South Australia; Nigel Rogers, Secretary of the Synod, Uniting Church in South Australia; and Peter Battersby, Property Officer of the Uniting Church in South Australia.

I would like to acknowledge some of the comments I made on 17 March when we debated this bill in this place. I talked about my father's long service to the church and I want to acknowledge that. He served 60-plus years as a lay preacher and, sadly, he passed away recently.