

THE AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL OF THE MISSION TO SEAFARERS INC.

c/o- 96 Hannell St, Wickham NSW 2293

PO Box 3, Wickham NSW 2293

+61 2 4961 5007

mts.org.au



PRESS RELEASE

7th July 2021

CALL FOR FEDERAL FUNDING OF AUSTRALIAN SHORE-BASED SEAFARER WELFARE

Australia. Following New Zealand’s recent legislative amendment supporting the provision of funding for seafarer welfare services, the Australian branch of international seafarer welfare charity The Mission to Seafarers is calling on the Australian Government to take steps to ensure a similar national funding model to fulfil their international commitment to seafarer welfare.

BACKGROUND

As part of the global Mission to Seafarers (MTS) network (missiontoseafarers.org) we are recognised as a leading provider of shore-based welfare services to Australian and international Seafarers. Our operational presence physically services approximately 500,000 Seafarers in 28 Australian ports annually with additional capacity for remote support for Seafarers visiting Australia’s remaining ports. Our work is entirely funded by charitable donations, community grants and supported by volunteers.

Port restrictions enacted in response to the COVID-19 pandemic have placed Seafarers under enormous pressure, leading to increased rates of suicide, anxiety and despair. These same restrictions have severely limited our ability to support the mental and physical health of crews in Australian waters and have resulted in increasing financial pressures on our centres, each of which is independently reliant on local community grants and in-kind support to remain operational.

NEW ZEALAND LEADS THE CHARGE

The Australian Council welcomes the New Zealand government’s recent and historic decision to take a “proven legislative route to long-term welfare service sustainability and financial security”ⁱ by updating its *Maritime Transport Act 1994* to allow Maritime Levies to provide funding for “the facilitation of, or support for, seafarer welfare services.”ⁱⁱ This commitment by the New Zealand government demonstrates the active recognition of the responsibility to “ensure that seafarers on ships visiting its ports have access to welfare services necessary for their health and well-being, promote the development of welfare facilities, and encourage the development of welfare boards.”

ⁱⁱⁱ - a responsibility shared by the Australia government as a signatory under the *Maritime Labour Convention, 2006* (MLC).

CALL FOR FEDERAL FUNDING

Securing funding for Seafarer welfare at the Federal level will reinforce the effectiveness of both the Australian Maritime Safety Authority and Australian Border Force and contribute to protecting the health and safety of those working on the sea to keep Australia's supply chains open; underpinning Australia's plan to continue our economic recovery in the wake of COVID-19.

We therefore respectfully request that the Australian Government follow New Zealand's lead in the establishment of a sustainable funding model to ensure the provision and development of seafarer welfare services. We note that the Australian Government is currently reliant on charity organisations in meeting its responsibilities under the MLC.

MTS Comments

MTS Australia Regional Director, Rev Canon Garry Dodd, commented: "We are hopeful that this historic move on the part of New Zealand in recognising the importance of secure funding for seafarer welfare will encourage Australia to do the same – after all, we are both signatories to the MLC. New Zealand have simply extended what is essentially a user-pays system of maritime levies to facilitate a sustainable model of funding for existing and future welfare services. Australia now has an opportunity to make a significant impact in an industry that is well-recognised for its regular mistreatment of workers – an opportunity that we would be remiss to let go given the terrible situations we've seen onboard the vessels that supply us with the ability to trade with the world."

National Liaison Bishop, Rt Rev John Stead, commented: "Seafarers deserve to have their dignity upheld. It is not enough that churches and community groups finance services for seafarer welfare. We look forward to the Australian Government taking a more active and participatory role in securing this vital part of the international obligations that we, as a nation, have voluntarily signed up to."

ENDS

ⁱ "In Force. New Zealand Amends Legislation to Provide Assured Seafarer Welfare Funding," *Human Rights At Sea* (blog), July 1, 2021, <https://www.humanrightsatsea.org/2021/07/01/in-force-new-zealand-amends-legislation-to-provide-assured-seafarer-welfare-funding/>.

ⁱⁱ "Maritime Transport Act 1994 No 104 (as at 01 April 2021), Public Act 191 Maritime Levies – New Zealand Legislation," accessed July 7, 2021, <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/1994/0104/latest/DLM336772.html>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Hon Michael Wood, "Govt Fulfilling Commitment to Improve Seafarer Welfare," *The Beehive*, accessed July 7, 2021, <http://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/govt-fulfilling-commitment-improve-seafarer-welfare>.