

Submission re Future Foundations for Giving
(proposed removal of DGR status for giving to Special Religious Education in schools)
Bayside Christian Education Board, Sydney, NSW

The Bayside Christian Education Board (BCEB), Sydney, is a sub-committee of Scripture Union Generate (SU Generate). The BCE Board is a combined arrangement of 10 (small) local churches in southern Sydney from a variety of Christian denominations who administer the provision of Combined Christian Special Religious Education (SRE) in two local high schools. The BCE Board has had a presence for 40 years at James Cook Boys Technology and Moorefields Girls High Schools, and, along with the SRE teacher, have a great working relationship with each school executive and community.

The Bayside Christian Education Board is comprised of voluntary representatives of the local churches, from a mixture of denominations, working together, from the:

Anglican Churches

Baptist Churches

Congregational Churches

Presbyterian Churches

Salvation Army

Uniting Churches

The Bayside Christian Education Board employs a fully trained and authorised SRE teacher on a 2 days a week permanent part-time basis to teach weekly at James Cook Boys Technology and Moorefields Girls High Schools during school terms. The BCE Board also pays for qualified and authorised casual SRE teachers for those times when our SRE teacher is not available.

In addition to providing SRE teachers to these schools, the BCE Board provides community welfare in consultation with the schools including breakfast club supplies, hot cross buns and chocolate prizes at Easter, hampers and grocery gift cards for families in need. All of this is available to everyone within the whole school community, not just faith based families. With the permission of each school, Bibles are also provided free of charge to students who wish to have one. All these additional community services are provided voluntarily by the local churches who are members of the BCE Board.

The average budget per annum to employ the permanent part-time SRE teacher and casuals, is approximately \$45,000 (including superannuation and administrative fees). 100% of this funding is made possible through giving from the 10 participating local churches (whom themselves face financial restraints) and the extraordinary generous donations from individual members of these churches and other interested supporters.

The DGR status of SU Generate for the purposes of giving to SRE is crucial. At least 50% of the donations received are from individuals who rely on the tax deductibility of their

contributions to be able to give the amounts they do. There is no private benefit received by the donors. It is an expression of their faith to give to the religious education of young people so they can explore issues of faith in their formative years.

In addition to regular giving, the BCE Board holds an annual fundraiser attended by members of the local church communities to boost funding. In the past, these fundraisers have been Trivia Nights held in local churches and Supporters' Breakfast gatherings. The BCE Board relies heavily on the tax deductibility of contributions received at these fundraising events to attract attendees.

In 2021, after studious research, through the lens of the most recent scholarship, and drawing on an in-depth qualitative study and specific case studies, Zehavit Gross and Suzanne D. Rutland published their book; **Study of Special Religious Education and its value to contemporary society.**

They concluded that SRE (of all faiths) provides key benefits including:

- * An effective values education that empowers student decision making, fosters student action and assigns real student responsibility
- * Strengthening the multicultural fabric of Australian schools
- * Important psychological benefits to students' mental health and wellbeing
- * Creating safe places for students to explore deeper questions of identity

Importantly, SRE contributes to the wellbeing framework within the NSW Department of Education school curriculum. This education is being funded by members of the community and local churches as a community service. The removal of DGR status for giving to religious instruction would significantly impact organisations like SU Generate who are responsible for the delivery of high quality SRE programs.

While the BCE Board agrees with the Productivity Commission's goal of increasing the number and types of charities eligible for DGR status, we don't believe this should be at the expense of charities who are providing Special Religious Education in schools, funded by grassroots members of faith communities across Australia.

In relation to the Productivity Commission's proposed principles-based approach in determining which charities should be eligible for DGR status, we make the following comments in relation to providers of SRE:

- 1. there is a rationale for taxpayer support because the activity is expected to generate net community-wide benefits and would otherwise likely be undersupplied by the market.**

There is an intrinsic link between formative religious instruction in childhood years and religious service in adult years, including service to the wider community on a voluntary basis. In addition, the NSW Department of Education has recognised the community-wide benefit of SRE by including it in the wellbeing framework of their

curriculum. If SRE was not provided by local church members, there would be an undersupply of religious education for young people in the school setting.

2. there are net benefits from providing government support for the activity through subsidising philanthropy using a tax deduction for giving (as opposed to other government funding mechanisms, like grants)

As many of the donors to SRE are individual taxpayers who are supporting SRE as an expression of their faith, we believe subsidising this philanthropic giving by using a tax deduction for giving is the best way to provide government support.

3. the activity is unlikely to create a material risk that tax-deductible donations can be converted to private benefits for donors

Donors to SRE do not derive any private benefits from their philanthropic funding of equipping future generations of Australians with religious education.

The BCE Board is a multi-denominational expression of the local Christian church in Australia. We would ask that the Productivity Commission respectfully consider the important contribution of faith communities to our wider local communities, including our local high schools in the provision of religious education. We respectfully request that the DGR status of giving for Special Religious Education in schools in Australia is preserved.

Kind regards

Bayside Christian Education Board (a sub-committee of SU Generate)