



# Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses (Australasia)

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7 February 2024

Philanthropy Inquiry  
Productivity Commission  
GPO Box 1428  
Canberra City ACT 2601

Via online form: [www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/current/philanthropy](http://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/current/philanthropy)

Dear Commissioners:

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Productivity Commission's Philanthropy Inquiry. We make this submission in response to submission 266 authored by Larissa Kaput and Steven Unthank on behalf of "Say Sorry" dated May 2023. The Say Sorry submission contains many unsubstantiated, false, and defamatory allegations about the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses which cannot be ignored.

Although the Say Sorry submission claims to advise broadly on religious corporate entities, the authors are in reality commandeering the Commission's submissions platform to advance their own aims, namely, the dissemination of false information about and advocating against the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses. Rather than address each and every falsehood line by line, we have provided a summary of the relevant religious beliefs and practices of Jehovah's Witnesses along with addressing some of the most egregious falsehoods.

## Jehovah's Witnesses in Australia

Jehovah's Witnesses are an internationally known Christian religion. There are 8.7 million Jehovah's Witnesses in 239 lands, with almost 75,000 Jehovah's Witnesses forming over 700 congregations throughout Australia. Congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses generally comprise individual congregants living in a particular neighbourhood or area.

Officials around the world have recognized the benefits of the charitable work of Jehovah's Witnesses.<sup>1</sup> For example, Jehovah's Witnesses' literacy programs have taught hundreds of thousands to read and write around the world.<sup>2,3</sup> Witnesses conduct prison

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<sup>1</sup> See for example: Jehovah's Witnesses Receive Recognition for Bible Education Work With Prisoners in Colombia < <https://www.jw.org/en/news/region/colombia/Jehovahs-Witnesses-Receive-Recognition-for-Bible-Education-Work-With-Prisoners-in-Colombia/>>; Helping the Deaf in the Emerald of the Equator < <https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/activities/help-community/deaf-people-emerald-of-the-equator-indonesia/>>; A Successful Campaign in Lapland < <https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/activities/ministry/successful-campaign-lapland-saami/>> Jehovah's Witnesses in the Community < <https://www.jw.org/en/gov-resources/global-information-brochures/brochure-jehovahs-witnesses-in-the-community/>>

<sup>2</sup> Jehovah's Witnesses contribute to literacy <<https://www.herald.co.zw/jehovahs-witnesses-contribution-to-literacy/>>

<sup>3</sup> See for example, Bible Education Promotes Literacy < <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/q201508/bible-education-promotes-literacy/>>

ministries to help rehabilitate inmates.<sup>4,5</sup> When disasters strike, Witnesses are prepared to take immediate action to provide practical assistance and unpaid volunteers provide basic necessities, medical supplies, and temporary or permanent housing.<sup>6</sup> In many countries, including Australia, Jehovah's Witnesses are helping an increasing number of immigrants and refugees to adjust to a new environment, a new language, and a new culture.<sup>7</sup> They offer Bible-based comfort to those who suffer tragedy or loss.<sup>8</sup>

Jehovah's Witnesses' activity is primarily financed by voluntary donations from individuals who are Jehovah's Witnesses. Jehovah's Witnesses are not expected to tithe or to donate any specific amount or percentage of their income. (2 Corinthians 9:7) They never take collections or charge admission at their meetings, nor do their ministers charge fees for baptisms, funerals, weddings, or other religious services. They do not raise money through bake sales, bazaars, bingo games, carnivals, dinners, raffles, or similar events, nor do they solicit donations. Donors' information is never shared or made available to the public. (Matthew 6:2-4) Jehovah's Witnesses' websites and publications do not contain revenue-generating advertisements.<sup>9</sup>

Jehovah's Witnesses have a balanced view when it comes to supporting charitable organisations. The statement found in the Bible, that "God loves a cheerful giver," is a guiding principle for Jehovah's Witnesses. (2 Corinthians 9:7) As such, Jehovah's Witnesses are not opposed to supporting charitable organisations. They recognise that certain charities do accomplish a measure of good. The religion of Jehovah's Witnesses does not review specific charities so as to recommend to congregants which they should support. Rather, it is left to each person to decide whether to support a specific cause. Each person is encouraged to carefully examine the facts, then make a personal decision.—Galatians 6:5.

## Jehovah's Witnesses' Treatment of Children

Some of the most egregious falsehoods in the Say Sorry submission concern how Witness parents raise their children and how the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses treats children. We are appalled at the authors' suggestion that Jehovah's Witnesses 'adversely treat children' and respectfully wish to address this matter.

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<sup>4</sup> Utah Jehovah's Witnesses take the Bible to the 'largest gated community' prison <<https://www.sitrib.com/religion/2023/06/30/utah-jehovahs-witnesses-take-bible/>>

<sup>5</sup> 10 years of community work at Yongah Hill <<https://www.flipsnack.com/ncci160/the-northam-advertiser-dec22jan23/full-view.html?p=16>>

<sup>6</sup> Do Jehovah's Witnesses Assist With Disaster Relief? <<https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/assist-with-disaster-relief/>>; Disaster Relief in 2022—Brotherly Love in Action <<https://www.jw.org/en/library/series/how-your-donations-are-used/Disaster-Relief-in-2022-Brotherly-Love-in-Action/>>; Disaster Relief in 2021—Not Abandoning Our Brothers and Sisters <<https://www.jw.org/en/library/series/how-your-donations-are-used/Disaster-Relief-in-2021-Not-Abandoning-Our-Brothers-and-Sisters/>>; Jehovah's Witnesses and Disaster Relief <<https://www.jw.org/en/gov-resources/global-information-brochures/brochure-jehovahs-witnesses-and-disaster-relief/>>

<sup>7</sup> Jehovah's Witnesses Help Refugees in Central Europe <<https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/activities/help-community/helping-refugees-central-europe/>>

<sup>8</sup> Jehovah's Witnesses in Australia Honored for Helping Detainees <<https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/activities/help-community/jehovahs-witnesses-australia-help-detainees/>>; Bringing Hope and Comfort to the Elderly <<https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/activities/help-community/hope-comfort-elderly-portland-victoria-australia/>>; A Campaign that Saved Lives <<https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/activities/help-community/campaign-saved-lives-tabasco-mexico/>>

<sup>9</sup> How Is the Work of Jehovah's Witnesses Financed? <<https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/donations-worldwide-work-finances-money/>>; How Do Jehovah's Witnesses Use Donations? <<https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/how-do-jw-use-donations/>>; They Ask for Work but Not for Pay <<https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/activities/construction/jehovahs-witnesses-construction-work-volunteers/>>

## Jehovah's Witnesses and Family Life

Jehovah's Witnesses view children as a sacred trust, "an inheritance from Jehovah." (Psalm 127:3) Like most parents, Jehovah's Witnesses want the best for their children. They teach their children what they think will benefit them—practical skills, as well as moral principles and religious beliefs. Jehovah's Witnesses believe that the Bible promotes the best way of life, so they try to instil its values in their children by studying the Bible with them and attending Christian meetings together. (Deuteronomy 6:6, 7) Officials around the world have recognised the extraordinary care Witness parents have for their family's health and education, as well as their physical, mental, and moral development.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, literature published by Jehovah's Witnesses on the topic of effective parenting has been used by officials to help address social issues in the community.<sup>11</sup>

Although the authors of the Say Sorry submission feel their "adverse childhood" was due to their being raised by Witness parents, studies demonstrate that very few persons raised by Witness parents would make such a claim. A SOFRES survey (conducted by the independent pool survey firm TNS Sofres of Paris, France, October 1998; results based on a random sample of 1,025 Jehovah's Witnesses and associates) showed that "as a whole, 98 % of Jehovah's Witnesses consider that their faith has led them to a rather harmonious family life and to the respect of laws."<sup>12</sup> Generally speaking, those raised in a Witness family feel well equipped for adult life and prepared to be productive members of society.<sup>13</sup>

Professor Bryan Ronald Wilson, Reader Emeritus in Sociology, All Souls College, Oxford, England, stated:

- "Witnesses in normal circumstances set great store by the unity of the family, and their family life in all the countries in which I have encountered them is of a very high moral order, sustained conscientiously by the religious community and its moral teachings. Far from being an agency of discord, in normal circumstances the Witnesses represent an agency of moral reform: their members lead lives of moral probity of a higher standard than the generality of the wider public."<sup>14</sup>

Witness parents do not force their children to adopt their faith and, unlike other Christian denominations, do not practice infant baptism. Jehovah's Witnesses teach their children Bible principles, and when the children grow older, they make their own informed decision about whether to become one of Jehovah's Witnesses.<sup>13</sup> No one is coerced or pressured to become one of Jehovah's Witnesses. If a Witness parent's child chooses not

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<sup>10</sup> See for example: <https://www.jw.org/en/news/region/russia/president-putin-gives-parenting-award-to-jehovahs-witnesses/>

<sup>11</sup> Thai Officials Use Publications From Jehovah's Witnesses to Aid Community Development  
<<https://www.jw.org/en/news/region/thailand/officials-use-publications-from-jehovahs-witnesses/>>

<sup>12</sup> SOFRES, Sociological study on Jehovah's Witnesses in France, October 1998, Ref : MHI-MVN 98-204. Random sample of 1,025 Jehovah's Witnesses and sympathizers.

<sup>13</sup> See for example the box 'How do those who were raised as Jehovah's Witnesses feel?' in the article, Do Jehovah's Witnesses Force Their Children to Adopt Their Faith? <<https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/jw-children-accept-faith-preach/>>

<sup>14</sup> Affidavit for the Golovinskiy Intermunicipal Court of Moscow, Case No 2-2208/98, November 1998

to adopt their faith, they still love their child dearly and do not sever their relationship solely because of their child's refusal to become one of Jehovah's Witnesses.

The European Court of Human Rights in the case of Jehovah's Witnesses of Moscow and Others v. Russia (no. 302/02, 10 June 2010) rejected unfounded allegations put to it by the Russian state regarding coercion. The Court unanimously:

- dismissed as completely unfounded the accusation that Jehovah's Witnesses infringe congregants' right to respect of their private life (§§ 116-121);
- found that there was no evidence to support the allegation "that the rights of Jehovah's Witness children had been violated on the ground that Biblical texts restrained their independent thinking, hindered the development of patriotic feelings and made them social outcasts" (§§ 123-127);
- found that there was no evidence that congregants were subjected "to psychological pressure, 'mind control' techniques and totalitarian discipline" (§§ 110 and 128-130), and
- found "nothing to suggest that any form of improper pressure or undue influence was applied" (§§ 131-146).

Doctor Raffaella Di Marzio, psychologist, stated the following:

- "Jehovah's Witnesses form a religion well-rooted in the social fabric. . . Allegations against the Jehovah's Witnesses organization whereby they would exert forms of 'undue influence,' 'mental manipulation,' 'deception,' or 'coercion' on individuals are shown to be totally groundless."<sup>15</sup>

On very rare occasions, a person under the age of 18 who is a baptized Jehovah's Witness is disfellowshipped (expelled) from the congregation for unrepentantly committing a serious Biblical sin. On such occasions, the minor's parents are still responsible for their child and will do what they can to provide him or her with food, clothing and shelter, as well as emotional and spiritual support. This includes providing religious education and training. The fact that a minor is no longer one of Jehovah's Witnesses does not change the normal relationship between a parent and a child.

### **Jehovah's Witnesses and Child Protection**

Jehovah's Witnesses abhor the abuse, mistreatment, and exploitation of children. The protection of children is of utmost concern and importance to all Jehovah's Witnesses, as the following published references show:

- "Jehovah God hates all forms of wickedness. (Read Psalm 5:4-6.) How he must hate child sexual abuse—an especially repugnant wicked deed! In imitation of Jehovah, we as his Witnesses abhor child abuse and do not

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<sup>15</sup> Being Jehovah's Witnesses: Living in the World Without Being Part of It," The Journal of CESNUR, v. 4, no. 6, 2020  
<[https://cesnur.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/tjoc\\_4\\_6\\_6\\_dimarzio.pdf](https://cesnur.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/tjoc_4_6_6_dimarzio.pdf)>

tolerate it in the Christian congregation.”—*The Watchtower*, May 2019, p. 9 para. 1.<sup>16</sup>

- “We do not tolerate in our midst individuals who unrepentantly commit wicked deeds and who bring reproach on the good name of the congregation.”—*The Watchtower*, May 2019, p. 9 para. 6.<sup>16</sup>
- “Jehovah’s Witnesses abhor child abuse and view it as a crime. (Romans 12:9) We recognize that the authorities are responsible for addressing such crimes. (Romans 13:1-4) The elders do not shield any perpetrator of child abuse from the authorities.”—Jehovah’s Witnesses’ Scripturally Based Position on Child Protection, para. 3.<sup>17</sup>

Professor Patrick Parkinson, a leading expert in child protection, stated:

- “The current policies and standards of [Jehovah’s Witnesses] do reflect a strong commitment to the protection of children. . . Within their faith tradition, [Jehovah’s Witnesses] are endeavouring to ensure that they act protectively towards children and adhere to the standards that could be expected of all child safe organisations. These are that they ensure that the authorities are made aware of any child who is in danger of abuse, they cooperate with any investigations resulting, and they seek to be vigilant to ensure the protection of children in their midst.”<sup>18</sup>

Dr Holly Folk, Associate Professor at Western Washington University, stated:

- “The Jehovah’s Witnesses have a public statement, that they, the ‘Jehovah’s Witnesses abhor child abuse as a sin and crime.’ . . . I believe that, overall, the Jehovah’s Witnesses, no less and perhaps more than other religious and secular groups, have striven to keep this commitment.”<sup>19</sup>

The religion of Jehovah’s Witnesses has endeavoured to address the pernicious evil of child abuse at its root by providing religious ministers (elders), congregants, and parents, with practical and Scripturally-based guidance and ongoing education on the subject.

As evidence of this, for more than 40 years, Jehovah’s Witnesses have provided Scripturally-based guidance and education in *The Watchtower* and *Awake!* magazines, and in religious books and videos on practical steps to protect children from the crime of sexual abuse. Those materials have been published and distributed in millions of copies

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<sup>16</sup> Love and Justice in the Face of Wickedness <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/watchtower-study-may-2019/love-justice-face-of-wickedness/>

<sup>17</sup> Jehovah’s Witnesses’ Scripturally Based Position on Child Protection <https://www.jw.org/en/gov-resources/global-information-brochures/packet-jw-scripturally-based-position-child-protection/>

<sup>18</sup> Professor Patrick Parkinson, ‘The Child Protection Policies of Jehovah’s Witnesses’ (Expert Report, August 2021) <https://www.childsafety.gov.au/system/files/2022-10/jehovahs-witnesses-attachment-patrick-parkinsons-independant-report-2021.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> Holly Folk, ‘Jehovah’s Witnesses and Sexual Abuse: 3. Some Common Misunderstandings’, Bitter Winter: A Magazine on Religious Liberty and Human Rights (Article, 14 January 2021) <https://bitterwinter.org/jehovahs-witnesses-and-sexual-abuse-3-some-common-misunderstandings/>

and in hundreds of languages free of charge.<sup>20</sup> Those educative materials confirm a determined effort by the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses to proactively prevent child sexual abuse and assist victims. A comprehensive history, with supporting extracts, of relevant material produced by Jehovah's Witnesses on the subject of child sexual abuse is set out at page 3 of *Jehovah's Witnesses' Scripturally Based Position on Child Protection*,<sup>17</sup> and page 12 of *The Watchtower*, May 2019.<sup>16</sup>

Professor Patrick Parkinson stated:

- “The overall evidence from their publications is that [Jehovah's Witnesses] have a very strong commitment to the protection of children from sexual abuse and to help them know what to do if molested. The educational materials put out by [Jehovah's Witnesses] to their members seek to educate their congregations about the problem of child sexual abuse to a greater extent than most faith-based organisations in Australia, in my experience.”<sup>18</sup>

As a religion, Jehovah's Witnesses do not provide or sponsor any activities that separate children from their parents such as crèches, playgroups, Sunday Schools, youth groups, or clubs. They do not provide or sponsor schools, orphanages, home care or any other activity where they assume responsibility for the care of children. Nor do they provide or sponsor any extracurricular activity, such as choirs, camps, outings, sports, outdoor walks, parties and similar activities for youths or adolescents.<sup>17</sup> This is based on Jehovah's Witnesses' understanding of Bible commands such as Deuteronomy 6:6, 7, which give parents the sole Scriptural responsibility to provide religious education and training to their children and that others should not usurp or assume that parental responsibility.

Professor Patrick Parkinson, stated the following:

- “Because [Jehovah's Witnesses] have no creches, Sunday Schools or other children's and youth programs, and circumstances do not arise in which children are separated from their parents in the shared life of their congregations, [Jehovah's Witnesses] have a very limited exposure to the risk of child sexual abuse occurring within their congregational activities. . . . In my view, overall, [Jehovah's Witnesses] have a relatively low level of risk of extrafamilial child sexual abuse within the life of the congregations. Critical to that assessment is that their congregational activities give no opportunity for perpetrators to be alone with children and they have no especial vulnerability or propensity risk.” [Emphasis added]<sup>18</sup>

Some parents personally decide to allow their child to join them in certain aspects of their volunteer ministry. This can be wholesome and educational for a child, and promote or enhance physical, mental, spiritual, moral, or social development without interfering with necessary schooling, balanced recreation, and needed rest. For example, a recent report by the Australian Institute of Family Studies found children were significantly less

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<sup>20</sup> Jehovah's Witnesses Educate Parents and Children to Protect Against Sexual Predators <https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/activities/help-community/safeguarding-children-sexual-abuse/>

likely to experience mental ill-health if they were involved in volunteering in their pre-teen years, including volunteering in 'church' related activities.<sup>21</sup>

### **Jehovah's Witnesses' Adherence to the Law**

We are deeply concerned by the baseless allegations included in the Say Sorry submission that suggest or intimate at unlawful activity by a number of legal entities supporting the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses. This is especially so because Jehovah's Witnesses believe that it is their responsibility before God to respect and cooperate with the authorities. (Romans 13:1) Jehovah's Witnesses follow the Scriptural direction to "be obedient to governments and authorities." (Titus 3:1) Officials worldwide recognize the Witnesses as peaceful, honest, and law-abiding citizens.<sup>22</sup> We have addressed the some of the allegations raised by the Say Sorry submission in the sections that follow.

### **Working With Children's Check**

A misleading narrative was presented regarding Mr. Unthank's allegations of breaches of the *Working with Children Act 2005* (Vic). Mr. Unthank unsuccessfully attempted to get a number of officials and authorities to take action against entities supporting the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses in relation to Working With Children Checks in Victoria. After none of the authorities were prepared to pursue the matter, he instituted a private criminal prosecution in his own right in the Victorian Magistrates Court. This action resulted in the Director of Public Prosecutions exercising his power to take over Mr. Unthank's prosecution for the sole purpose of withdrawing all charges. As reported in the media at the time<sup>23</sup>, the matter was "thrown out of court", as the Director of Public Prosecutions viewed the matter as "not seen to be in the public interest." The media further reported, that "Mr Unthank said he and other members of the [withheld] congregation who wished to remain anonymous, were 'disappointed' with the decision". Mr. Unthank did not request the Director of Public Prosecution to take over the case, nor did his actions result in the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses having to change their practices or policies.

### **National Redress Scheme**

The authors of the Say Sorry submission have repeatedly made false allegations across many forums regarding Jehovah's Witnesses' participation in the National Redress Scheme. In our opinion, these amount to deliberate attempts to mislead government inquiries. For example, in a recent public hearing, Ms. Kaput attempted to prove that Jehovah's Witnesses were not fully participating in the National Redress Scheme by giving evidence that one specific entity supporting Jehovah's Witnesses was not participating in the Scheme, ignoring the fact that this entity *did not qualify* to participate in the Scheme, as it did not exist for any of the period covered by the Scheme. Now in this submission, Ms. Kaput states that she still hasn't "heard of a single Jehovah's Witness survivor who

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<sup>21</sup> Prosocial behaviours and the positive impact on mental health < <https://growingupinaustralia.gov.au/research-findings/snapshots/prosocial-behaviours-positive-impact-mental-health>>

<sup>22</sup> See for example: Jehovah's Witnesses and Political Neutrality <<https://www.jw.org/en/gov-resources/global-information-brochures/brochure-jehovahs-witnesses-and-political-neutrality/>>

<sup>23</sup> Latrobe Valley Express February 27, 2012

has received all three components of redress.” As you may be aware, under the Scheme’s legislation, “Protected Information” must only be obtained, used or disclosed by specific persons for specific purposes. Therefore, the assumption by Ms. Kaput that the Scheme would personally inform her of the outcome of any individual’s application for redress involving participating institutions of Jehovah’s Witnesses is farcical. These baseless assertions do nothing to assist inquiries in fulfilling their Terms of Reference. In any case, contrary to Ms. Kaput’s allegation, we have confirmed with the Jehovah’s Witnesses Participating Group’s Representative that a number of individuals have received all three components of redress.

Jehovah’s Witnesses have fully onboarded onto the National Redress Scheme with more than 700 registered entities participating, including every single congregation registered as a basic religious charity which qualified to participate. Further, the Group’s Representative has agreed to be a funder for every congregation of Jehovah’s Witnesses that could possibly be named in a redress application, including those no longer in existence.

### **Corporate Financial Abuse**

We view the shameful allegations of “coercive philanthropic decisions” and that Jehovah’s Witnesses comprise “~70,000 vulnerable adherents” as derogatory and highly defamatory. The two so-called “case studies” that are given as corroborating evidence are both entirely fictitious.

1. The authors allege there was “a Queensland congregation that voted to ‘donate’ the proceeds of their church sale to the ‘Brisbane Congregation’ (which does not exist).” This is false. Brisbane Congregation of Jehovah’s Witnesses Incorporated is a legal entity holding title as bare trustee to properties used as public places of worship on behalf of all unincorporated congregations of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Queensland. As purely the bare trustee, Brisbane Congregation of Jehovah’s Witnesses Incorporated has *never* been the recipient of any proceeds of a sale of a Kingdom Hall.
2. The authors allege there was “an Australian Capital Territory congregation that had its funds drained. A member of this second congregation called an extraordinary meeting of the congregation charity; he was abruptly excommunicated.” This also is false. Each member of a congregation charity is entitled to one vote when considering dissolution and the distribution of remaining assets. Any member is within his legal right to vote however he sees fit regarding the congregation’s assets and would *never* be excommunicated (disfellowshipped) for exercising this right.

### **Financial activity of Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of Australia**

Mr. Bill Hahn is presented as an authority on the financial activity of Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of Australia (Watchtower). We have confirmed that Mr. Hahn has never held a position within Watchtower. Accordingly, Mr. Hahn has never been involved



with the financial activity of Watchtower. We have also confirmed, after speaking with the entities that are legible from Mr. Hahn's hand-drawn note, that the information contained within it is mere speculation and in fact false.

Watchtower's financial reports for the year ending August 2015, partially quoted in Say Sorry's submission, were compiled in accordance with Australian Accounting Standards, other authoritative pronouncements of the Australian Accounting Standards Board, and requirements of the Australian Charities and Non-for-profits Commission Act 2012. These were independently audited by a Registered Company Auditor, submitted to the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission ("ACNC") and then disclosed on the ACNC's public charity register. The allegations that "by the time the Jehovah's Witnesses appeared before the Royal Commission in July and August, 2015, their funds were literally empty" is clearly false from looking at the publicly available data. A comparison of previous years' balance sheets, as publicly available on the ACNC website, shows an approximate \$4 million increase in net assets from 2013 to 2015, the years leading up to Jehovah's Witnesses appearing before the Royal Commission. Say Sorry similarly makes repeated claims of inappropriate off-shore sending of monies. Once again, no evidence is provided to support these claims. We reject all such claims as demonstrably false.

### **Corporate Control**

The Say Sorry submission states that the registered charities supporting the work of Jehovah's Witnesses in Australia "collectively are for the hierarchical benefit of the primary beneficiaries," the persons who make up the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses. They also allege that a "large number of Jehovah's Witnesses charities" are "under the umbrella control of the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, Inc., and its controlling governing body. " These accusations are patently false.

The Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses is an ecclesiastical body that provides religious direction and guidance to Jehovah's Witnesses worldwide. The Governing Body does not manage the temporal or secular affairs of Jehovah's Witnesses or the conduct of individual congregations; nor does it have any legal authority or control over congregations.

Each of the more than 700 separate congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses around Australia is an unincorporated association and is a separately registered charity. Each congregation is made up of members, who collectively choose to follow the religious beliefs of the Jehovah's Witness faith. Congregations are organised and governed ecclesiastically. There is no legal relationship between congregations, and any national or international entity supporting the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses, or the Governing Body. Each congregation makes no attempt to hide their temporal and secular activities. They are registered with the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) and the ACNC. They make available their governing documents and identity of responsible people on the ACNC register. They invite the public to their twice weekly religious meetings, whereupon any member of the public can view their financial activity as posted on the congregation's notice board. The accusations "that the large number of Jehovah's Witnesses charities

exist to hide the extent of the real estate and financial siphoning, from private philanthropic donations by Australians” are false.

### **Media References to Corporate Misconduct**

Finally, we note that Say Sorry attempt to evidence some of their allegations of corporate and financial misconduct by referring to “dialogue between NewsCorp and the Jehovah’s Witnesses institution” and attaching<sup>24</sup> an online article date 14 June 2020. This attachment is in violation of the Inquiry’s Information Policy which states, “A party should not submit material for which it is not the copyright owner - such as newspaper articles - a reference or link can be made to this material in the submission.” Say Sorry are not in a position to provide a link due to NewsCorp having withdrawn this article. Furthermore, after being alerted to the false and defamatory material contained in the article, NewsCorp issued a public apology to Jehovah’s Witnesses “for any damage or loss that may have been caused by the article”<sup>25</sup>. As both Ms. Kaput and Mr. Unthank featured heavily in the article, it is difficult to believe that they were not aware that it has been the subject of a nation-wide take down and public apology. We are shocked at this flagrant attempt to deliberately mislead the Inquiry.

### **Conclusion**

We trust this submission clarifies a number of allegations raised by the Say Sorry submission. If the Commission has additional questions regarding the beliefs, practices, and activities of Jehovah’s Witnesses, we would be pleased to answer these.

Yours faithfully

*Christian Congregation of  
Jehovah’s Witnesses (Australasia)*

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<sup>24</sup> Submission 266 by Say Sorry – Attachment 2

<sup>25</sup> See Appendix 1 - We attach as proof, copies of NewsCorp’s apology across a number of its syndications dated 25 June 2020. These are provided “in confidence” to the Inquiry as we respectfully recognise we are not the copyright holders.