

Submission to the Federal Productivity Commission regarding the Draft Report on Philanthropy and the Future Foundations for Giving

Copy to: Mr Julian Leaser MP

This submission requests the retention of tax deductions for donations made to charities which support Special Religious Education (SRE) in NSW public schools. I have been a volunteer SRE teacher for over 20 years.

I have seen that **SRE gives much more than it takes from our community.**

For example, a number of years ago my mother taught SRE in NSW Government primary and secondary Schools. One boy she taught in primary school wrote to her many years later (just before she died). He told her that he was married and had two daughters. He said that some time ago he had become an alcoholic and his marriage was about to disintegrate. His doctor told him if he continued drinking he would die. He felt he couldn't change and then he remembered a verse from the bible that my mother had taught him: *'With God nothing is impossible'*. He decided to believe this verse. He went to church and there he became a committed Christian. After becoming a recovering alcoholic, he bought a farm and took in other recovering alcoholics. He contacted my mother because he wanted to thank her for teaching him a verse that saved his life.

This experience and many others allow me to conclude that **a small investment in SRE can far exceed the returns.**

Because of my faith, I teach SRE in two NSW primary schools as well as coordinate a team of volunteer SRE teachers in both of these schools. I make financial contributions to SRE and I value the tax deductibility that makes the cost of our expenses viable.

I have seen young lives change as they become children of faith. Their anxieties diminish and their faces show confidence and joy. Only last year a Year Six boy whom I taught changed dramatically, from being a quiet somewhat sad looking boy, to being a happy contented boy as he expressed his faith and new found hope. A girl I taught, also in Year 6, said to me that she used to have a wobbly

path but now she has a straight path and that she knows now that God has directed her to a path that has light, not darkness.

Following the resumption of SRE after a pause during COVID pandemic, the Principal of Hornsby North Public School (where I teach,) said to me how much she and the staff value SRE. She said that the return of SRE to her school produced a **noticeable positive change in students and staff**. She said how very glad she was that we (SRE teachers) could now return to the school.

SRE does have community support. This is shown by the huge number of volunteers who believe it is so valuable that they willingly give up their time to teach SRE in the public schools. I have seen this in the team that I coordinate in Hornsby Heights and Hornsby North public schools. These volunteers willingly donate their time because they know the value of providing SRE for the students.

A 2015 study backed by the NSW Department of Education supported the continuation of SRE. This research found that SRE gives **psychological benefits to students** as they look to having faith in a higher being. Students of SRE learn to love one another and this promotes social acceptance and multiculturalism.

SRE provides the opportunity for young people to learn about a faith which gives back much more than it takes from our community. Research recently quoted by the Sydney Anglican Diocese, found that people of faith are **25% more likely to donate money AND 23% more likely to volunteer** their time to SECULAR charities than their secular counterparts.

Tax deductibility for financial contributions which support SRE will not only assist SRE to continue, but also recognise and value the contribution faith communities make to Australia. Please recommend the continuation of tax deductibility for donations to support SRE.

Yours sincerely

Merle Lovelock,