

Recommendation – removing DGR status for ‘religious education in public schools’ – MISPLACED – DO NOT IMPLEMENT

The commission assumes that there is no community benefit and that somehow donors are receiving a benefit by donating to charities whose purpose is religious education in public schools. This reasoning is flawed

I have been a volunteer scripture (special religious education) teacher since 2003 ie over 20 years, and also a volunteer coordinator of teachers in NSW since 2016 ie for 7+ years.

--the children who participate in scripture classes most do not come from homes who uphold the religion. I have had children in my class who were curious about religious questions and the classes had a chance for the children to explore such religious issues (with their parent/carers' consent) . That is the purpose of public education a chance for children to explore and be educated in issues they are curious about.

--I recall from my own childhood -that the different religious offerings at the public school gave me an understanding that my friends had different religions – but we all still played together in the playground. This is an important lesson for children to understand that despite their being people of different religious beliefs we all can be part of one harmonious community. That is especially important in public education. It is against community interest for religious education only to be in private schools.

---since 2012 there has been a secular alternative to scripture classes in NSW – Special religious education in Ethics run by Primary Ethics and such has DGR status. It is unfair and unequitable for it to have DGR status and then take away the providers of Special Religious Education providers DGR status to help manage training and administration costs. I am coordinator and the regulation has so many different areas of compliance. Any charity needs funds to have software and training to ensure laws are upheld – and it is anti-religious to deny such Scripture providers DGR status as this will likely lessen donor pool. To preference secularist groups in schools is to give them an unfair advantage to be able to pay for compliance and regulation – and religious groups cannot source funds so easily.

--I have donated to special religious education in public schools and receive zero benefit for this.

--I have seen well -done puppet shows on the meaning of Christmas for whole school assemblies ie no assumption of faith background of child watching - from Quiz worx inc and this is providing a huge community benefit of education and a chance for the children to hear a story and basis for hope.

--religious education in public schools – the special religious education has been subject of a report noting the benefits for the children.

The 2018 report “Study of Special Religious Education and its value to contemporary society” by Zehavit Gross and Suzanne D. Rutland noted *“In addition to providing important psychological benefits to students’ health and wellbeing, SRE classes can strengthen the multicultural fabric of Australia and foster social cohesion by providing a sense of belonging and safe places for students to explore deeper questions of cultural and religious identity in an environment of trust and respect.”*

Most importantly – religion is the once source for children to have a hope in this world of uncertainly of despair.

BUILDING FUNDS IN PRIVATE SCHOOLS – do not remove DGR status

Again the assumption that donors to these funds obtain a private benefit is misplaced.

The buildings serve no only the school but wider-community

I have been to charity (with DGR status) fundraising events in the school halls + strata community meeting in school classroom and AGM in school hall. Also academic lectures aimed at general community. And a cultural conference.

These school buildings are helping the non-profit sector have meeting places.

The only reason in NSW why some buildings may not be shared is because of some “section 83C” requiring all private school assets to be used for “education use only”. The productivity commission should ask that funds with DGR donations should be mandated to be shared for non-profit community uses.

REMOVING LEADERS OF LARGE RELIGIOUS GROUPS?

For ACNC to have right to remove leadres of large religious organisations is a breach of church and state. Let the congregation remove their leaders if they have done wrong. But otherwise, this is a

totalitarian way to undermine religious leadership. If any unlawful conduct of a religious group then this will be caught by other laws.

I note that ACNC has no investigatory powers for even secular non-profits so why suddenly investigatory powers for religious groups is discrimination .

UNFAIRNESS OF LOBBY GROUPS getting DGR status

Enabling lobby groups to get DGR status - means that the anti-religious lobby groups can use tax-payer funds to erode religious groups. Tax payers should not fund lobby groups

Also you will be asking religious groups to hide their religion. This will turn religion underground which helps no one .

Australia is diverse and it is multi-religious and secularists should not try to have policies to undermine law-abiding religious groups.

CONCLUSION

Australia is multi-cultural and multi-faith. And the current DGR exemptions for religious education in public schools + buildings school funds should remain.

And ACNC should not have power to depose leaders of large religious groups.

If Productivity Commission wants to encourage philanthropy, then the current laws should remain.