

## Submission to the inquiry by the Productivity commission (Australian Federal Government) on “Philanthropy”

I believe that the Australian Government is not doing enough to encourage philanthropy. Philanthropy is an integral part of keeping community healthy for all citizens. Our community, more than ever is in dire need of strengthening and if we fail to act, both current and future citizens will bear the cost of our inaction.

We see Australians helping out all the time. People want to help but that is not always done by giving money. Look at the endless hours spent by volunteer lifesavers, SES, rural fire brigade members, sporting coaches, drivers for community transport, fundraising events, etc etc. The list is endless.

Our wonderful volunteers though, are under pressure. There is a generation that has been very community minded, and they are now getting old. There have been many a wonderful community organization that have closed their doors over the last few years (COVID aside) as those members are unable to continue, often after decades of volunteer community service. People are also under time and financial pressures that makes it very difficult to contribute to the community as they would like to do. There are also people who have moved to Australia and would like to be involved but have no idea how to in their new homeland. So it is very difficult for organizations to find enough volunteers.

This is an issue because our community is in a fragile state. In Australia we have not only encountered the COVID pandemic but have endured a 10-year drought, terrible bush fires and enormous floods. All of us have been impacted by COVID in shared and individual ways but many have at the same time had their lives heavily impacted by these natural disasters on top of the stress of COVID.

When we are faced with tragedy, uncertainty, or disaster we need each other. That has been hard because we all suffered at the same time and who are we to turn to. Community is vital. In Australia we are fortunate in so many ways. We should not ignore our privileged situation, but we need to foster and look after what we have. We need to develop, enhance, and grow community in every way we can for the benefit of all citizens of Australia (and ultimately other countries that will in one way, or another be benefited).

This is why it is vitally important for philanthropy to be encouraged. Philanthropy can not only be financial, but all resources can be given time, money, goods, services skills etc. Philanthropy is a sure way to strengthen a community in a way that governments are unable to.

Governments need to trust the community that they know what is needed in their own area. Look at the many disastrous outcomes when governments have ignored the local community who knew their own needs and situations.

Communities know what they need and will often just get on with it and get it done. When the government encourages that, then it can be a motivation for the community to do even more to help themselves. Deductible gift recipient status should be expanded not cut back. Also other forms of giving should be included, not only financial giving.

It has alarmed me that there seem to be 2 areas that have been recommended to have their DGR status removed. SRE (Special religious education in NSW) and private school buildings funds.

SRE has enormous benefits for the students. In the public school system in NSW students are unable to learn about any religious beliefs. While I realize the curriculum does include some brief information on all religions, from what my own child was taught, I have no confidence in the accuracy of that teaching. Many of the students in SRE do not have access to religious teaching elsewhere and this is their only opportunity to be taught from qualified teachers specifically trained in religious education. Parents want their children to learn from qualified SRE teachers and they specifically and purposefully enroll their children in SRE. I believe that there are over 300 000 children enrolled in SRE every week in NSW.

It comes across as discrimination that the 2 areas that have been recommended to have their DRG status removed are both religious (private schools are mainly religious based). It is also incomprehensible that both these are related to school-age children. Is it because children can't vote or pay tax that they are being so discriminated against?

I myself taught SRE for many years. I also coordinated a large team of SRE teachers who taught at all the schools in the local area. These proposed changes would disadvantage the volunteer teachers enormously. The high-quality materials that are provided free to all teachers are very costly to provide. All students are also provided with their own workbook free of charge. This material has been specifically produced to be taught in Australian schools. It is difficult to find and train enough volunteers to teach all the classes as there are large numbers of students enrolled. I also know how big the bill was each semester for all the teaching materials. It is an expensive bill but I knew that it was out of peoples generous giving that we were able to buy that material for the benefit of the students.

Over many years of teaching I have taught in various low socio-economic areas such as Mt Druitt and Warilla. There is no way the teachers or the students in these areas could afford the books for the lessons. The teachers have all their materials provided and their training is also provided. They are volunteers. It is the generosity of others who enabled those students to be taught. We didn't even know those people who enabled us to teach the children in those schools. It is humbling to know that we were supported by people who we didn't even know.

I have no idea why anyone would even consider removing the DRG status for SRE. The amount of tax collected on donations to SRE materials would not outweigh the benefits of the SRE lessons being provided.

Children and young people have suffered enormously from the pandemic, possibly worse than any other age group. There have been endless reports of anxiety, depression and mental health issues in school age children and young people (many of who were of school age during the pandemic). It is beyond belief that a service that teaches young people and children love, strength, self-worth, hope, surety and so much more, would be targeted as a place to get a bit more tax. If you are looking at it from a financial perspective, then it is way more cost effective to support SRE than to pay for mental health professionals and endless programs. Morally I am appalled that religious groups are being targeted.

I hope that the recommendation to remove the DRG status will not be implemented. I encourage the government to expand the program to go beyond just financial giving and to include other sorts of giving.

If the community does more to help, build and strengthen themselves and then the government can get on with other things.

The community does a better job at it anyway!