



Buddhist Council of Victoria

Representing and serving the Buddhist community in Victoria

www.bcv.org.au | ABN 13 436 635 535 | Reg. No. A0033871C

A brief submission from the Buddhist Council of Victoria on the benefit of DGR status for religious education

The Buddhist Council of Victoria (BCV) acts as peak body for member temples and Buddhist organisations in Victoria. Membership is voluntary and varies from year to year but typically involves some 40 member organisations. It is not representative of all Buddhist groups or organisations but does have representatives from all major Buddhist traditions and ethnic groups.

BCV currently has DGR status for the purpose of providing Special Religious Instruction in Victorian Government Primary Schools. However, due to changes introduced by the Victorian Government over the last decade, it is no longer practicable to provide religious instruction in these schools and the BCV has suspended this program. At present, BCV does not have DGR status for the social involvement it runs – prison and health care chaplaincy and a domestic violence awareness program. As such, the proposed changes will not affect BCV itself but we are of the opinion that they have the potential to have a profound effect on the Buddhist community in Victoria.

At the time of writing, BCV understands that, in terms of accredited school entities there are only two Buddhist focused schools in Victoria. At this point in time, they cater for primary students only although we understand there is intention for at least one of these schools to ultimately extend to secondary level.

As such the community is very young in terms of its development. There remains a debate within some of the community as to the need for separate Buddhist schools or whether it is better to simply supplement state-based education with specific religious education delivered in the community. In all likelihood there will be a mix going forward. In this sense, from a Buddhist community perspective, the situation may be more similar to that encountered in the 1950's when DGR status was first approved for school building funds. It is tempting to suggest a more nuanced version where smaller organisations are left eligible for additional support in this developmental phase. However attempts at positive discrimination are fraught with definitional difficulties, difficult to adjudicate and probably costly to administer. It is beyond the resources of the BCV to do other than suggest this as a consideration.

It is clear from discussions with our members that DGR status does enhance giving. While we note the Productivity Commission's view that the benefits of these donations accrue most directly to those giving (or perhaps to their offspring) we make the following comments: firstly, that in donating to a school building fund, the benefits to the school are realized directly without mediation through another agency. This provides the school with needed funds in a most tangible manner while from the donor's perspective their feeling of



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connection is enhanced and direct effect is given to their values and aspirations. Conversely, if the outcome is that the Australian government has to otherwise support more directly an educational institution the benefit arising from increased taxation is correspondingly diminished. In the absence of DGR status, while some dollars may find their way to a secular philanthropy, it is likely that many will simply cease.

There are other aspects of the proposal to eliminate DGR status for school building funds which will generally affect the Buddhist community. Most of the larger temples in Victoria have Dhamma (religious education) classes for children. In our experience, all those in the Buddhist community - but most especially the ethnic communities - are concerned to ensure that the traditions and teachings of the Buddha are passed on to the younger generation. This is because we believe these teachings are beneficial and contribute to the well-being of the individual. We are naturally concerned for our families, friends and children but we also consider the teachings to be of broader social benefit. We believe that ethical behaviour, compassion and wisdom are beneficial qualities for individuals and society as a whole.

The provision of DGR status for School building funds has enabled many temples to establish facilities where Buddhist teachings can continue. It cannot be stressed enough how important this is to the Buddhist community. It is our understanding that this is also an issue of significant concern to other faith communities, especially those who, like Buddhist, constitute minority or fledgling groups.

Finally, it should be pointed out that, from a Buddhist perspective, one of the key perfections encouraged by the Buddha is the perfection of generosity. We are keen to foster this view. We believe in and encourage donations for religious purposes and believe this promotes giving and generosity more generally.