

Dear Commissioners,

I am highly concerned by the draft report and reforms to the DGR system. I think it is good that you are looking at expanding the system to cover more initiatives such as animal welfare, but I am quite concerned that to achieve this you are taking away DGR status from almost exclusively religious charities – which will have a huge impact on important initiatives such as school building funds and religious education in government schools.

Australia is the most multicultural nation on earth, and approximately 60% of Australians identify with a religion. Yet, your report seems to be based on an ideology that religion is of no community-wide benefit. Research shows that one of the best ways to promote social cohesion is through religious education in schools. Many students who struggle in the school environment find love and support from their SRE groups.

The Religious Education teachers in Australia represent the largest weekly group of volunteers in our nation. In a report where on the one hand, you are articulating the government's goal to double giving (financial and volunteering) by 2030, on the other hand you are removing privileges and help from faith communities that represent a huge proportion of the people who will help you, and are helping you right now, achieve that goal. This is not a wise decision.

On top of that, school building funds are to have their DGR status removed, because back in the 1950s when DGR status was established, no government support was given by other means and now it is. This is not a good enough reason – unless the government is going to actually front up and supply ALL the capital expenditure needs of these schools (which I'm sure they won't) why would you then seek to penalise both the schools AND the private citizens who are donating to these schools and funding education? If many of the smaller private schools become too expensive, is their enough space in the public system to accommodate increased numbers?

As a family removing the DGR will not stop us from giving to a cause that is in line with my values. This will mean we have less to give to other causes such as Wildlife Conservation or Salvation Army.

We pray that the DGR status will continue!