SUMMARY REPORT

The 300th meeting of the Catholic Education Commission, New South Wales was held on 15 October 2008 in the Taylor/Barlow Rooms, Polding Centre, Level 8, 133 Liverpool Street Sydney. The meeting was chaired by Dr. Kristin Johnston rsj.

A Summary Report of the Commission meeting is provided below:

1) **2009 CEC WorkPlan**

The Commission approved the 2009 CEC WorkPlan. It will now be presented to the NSW/ACT bishops for endorsement at their November 2008 meeting.

The WorkPlan is the guide to the Commission and the CEC Secretariat for the forthcoming year. It has been prepared based upon three strategic objectives:

- Catholic Identity;
- Advocacy and Representation; and,
- Resources and Services.

Once the Bishops have endorsed the 2009 WorkPlan, it will be posted on the CEC Website. The three CEC Secretariat Directorates will then put the Plan into action, while the Commission will monitor progress. Achievements against the 2009 WorkPlan will form the basis of CEC’s 2009 Annual Report.

2) **2009 CEC Budget**

The Commission considered and approved the 2009 CEC Budget. It will now be presented to the NSW/ACT Bishops for endorsement at their November 2008 meeting.

CEC’s Annual Budget is approximately $5.5 million and is funded by levies (approved by the Bishops), interest earnings and recoupment of expenses from programs. CEC aims each year to balance its budget.

3) **Nominations for NCEC Committees**

The NCEC has requested nominations for membership of its committees from the State and Territory Catholic Education Commissions. The Commission considered the NCEC’s requests for nominations and has forwarded names for NCEC consideration.
4) **Enrolment Procedures**

The Commission considered the new enrolment form being introduced by the NSW Department of Education and Training. Inconsistencies in Catholic sector enrolment procedures were highlighted during the recent Police request for searches of records relating to missing child Tegan Lane. Commissioners agreed that the Catholic school sector needs to develop consistent procedures similar to those that apply in the government school sector. The CEC will work with Diocesan Schools Authorities and Congregational Schools to achieve this aim.

5) **National Student Wellbeing Framework**

The Commission considered a progress report from the CEC Student Wellbeing Working Group. The Commission agreed that the CEC Secretariat would develop advisory protocols for school counsellors and a communications strategy, including a periodic newsletter. The Working Group is to continue to give regular updates, particularly in relation to DEEWR’s development of a National Student Wellbeing Framework.

6) **Commonwealth’s Quality Education Plan**

The Australian government is intending to include individual school performance reporting as a condition of the new National Education Agreement. MCEETYA has established a special working group to examine, and provide a report on, relevant measures to guide school evaluation, accountability, and resource allocation. MCEETYA’s objective is to ensure that the most meaningful indicators are identified to enable reasonable and valid comparisons to be made between like schools. The Commission considered a progress report on the development of performance indicators and its committees are monitoring further developments.

7) **Commonwealth Schools Assistance Bill 2008**

Commissioners noted that the Schools Assistance Bill 2008 applies to non-government schools only. This Bill is part of the structural changes to school funding being put into place by the Australian government.

The new Bill allows for the establishment of new school systems. This initiative appears to have occurred as a consequence of the recognition that the number of non-government schools (other than Catholic) has increased substantially over the last thirty years.

The new Bill is not as prescriptive as in the past but it provides wide scope for the Minister to shape how funds are delivered to systems and schools, through the making of Regulations.

The CEC is expecting to finalise the new agreement for the 2009 to 2012 Quadrennium in December 2008. Commissioners also noted that there is a requirement in the new funding arrangements to implement the new National Curriculum K - 12.
8) **Prior To School Initiatives**

Improving early childhood education is a high priority for the Australian government. It was a key promise in the lead up to the November 2007 Federal election. The Australian government is offering significant new funding to put its election promise into effect. The NSW government is also reviewing its Regulations on pre-schooling and child care to facilitate this initiative.

The Commission has established a Working Group to explore how the NSW Catholic sector can work within the new paradigm. The Commission considered a progress report from the Working Group.

9) **Peer Sexual Abuse Guidelines**

The Catholic Education and Social Welfare Co-ordinating Committee (CESWCC) had been tasked with reviewing inappropriate student sexual behaviour and recommending strategies to deal with such behaviour. The Commission has considered several progress reports. At this meeting, the Commission reviewed draft guidelines for school principals and asked CESWCC to present the final guidelines early in 2009 for formal approval, before they are made available to Dioceses and Congregational schools.

10) **BOS Changes to NSW HSC Examinations and Student Assessment**

For some time, the NSW Board of Studies has been reviewing the NSW HSC syllabii and related student assessment procedures. It has recently published a proposed timeline for implementing changes and related matters. The BOS has called for comments. The Commission gave *in principle* agreement to the recommended BOS changes. However, the proposed timeline is not considered to be feasible. The Commission will provide its feedback to the BOS after the 19 November 2008 Commission meeting.

11) **National Education Architecture**

The Australian government has advised that it will establish a National Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Board under the Commonwealth Authorities and Companies Act. It was noted that this Board will report to MCEETYA. The Commission welcomes this development.

12) **Copyright EUS 2007 Annual Review Report**

Commissioners noted the Electronic Use System 2007 Annual Review Report. The Report highlights an increase in the reproduction and communication of digital copyright items by schools. Commissioners consider that there will be a further increase in accessing and using digital material once students and teachers become more familiar with web related classroom applications.

This is an area of complexity. MCEETYA negotiations are underway with CAL to determine appropriate payments for accessing digital copyright material. The Commission is strongly supportive of MCEETYA initiatives in this area.
13) National Goals For Schooling

COAG is expected to approve the new National Goals for Schools at its meeting in November 2008. Consultations have been occurring over the last few months. The Commission has considered the Draft and supports:

- the broadening of the National Goals to apply to education generally rather than confining them to schooling K-12;
- the recognition of those implications which arise from the necessary introduction of new technologies to educational contexts;
- the focus on personalised learning;
- the acknowledgement of the needs of disadvantaged students; and,
- the inclusion of spirituality in the educational goals.

The CEC has written to DET and the NCEC responding to the call for comments.

14) 2009 Country Areas Program (CAP)

The CEC Secretariat met with CAP Dioceses in October 2008. The Commission accepted their recommendation to implement the new funding arrangements in 2009 without phasing schools on or off the program.

15) Australian Early Development Index (AEDI)

The Commission is ready to implement AEDI school readiness screening in 2009. However, the NSW government is yet to finalise the NSW implementation agreement with the Australian government. This agreement will include details of a cross sectoral implementation support package, including funding.

16) 2009 Funding Arrangements For Catholic Systemic Schools

The 2009 funding distribution arrangement for Commonwealth and NSW State recurrent grants proceeds under the amended procedures agreed by the NSW Bishops in June 2008. The distribution takes into account the components of school size, diocesan system size, school SES scores, ABS remoteness category and base grant calculated on the funding schools attract on actual SES score or from funding maintenance. Each school system has been provided with an initial draft of estimated 2009 allocations incorporating 2008 school census enrolments and the recent AGSRC increases. The only element unknown at this time is the second half-year increase for State Per Capita Grants. The Commonwealth funding arrangements for 2009-2012 continue those of the current Quadrennium. The operation and final outcomes of the 2009 funding distribution is being kept under review by the Commission’s Resources Policy Committee.
17) Catholic School Enrolments 2008


18) Early Childhood Framework

As part of the COAG early childhood reforms, consultations on the discussion paper "The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood and Care" were held in July-August 2008. Issues for the NSW Catholic schools sector include multiple regulatory frameworks, the need for parent choice of Catholic services, costs/funding, and linkages to the proposed National Curriculum K-12. It is expected that an exposure draft of the national quality standards together with a rating system for providers will be made available for public consultation late in 2008.

It is also expected that the broad direction of a more streamlined regulatory system will be publicly announced later this year. Following national endorsement, the final framework is expected to be introduced from 1 July 2009. This will coincide with the proposed implementation of the revised NSW Children’s Services Regulation.

19) Local government Association Planning Regulations

Since the February 2008 meeting, CEC in collaboration with AIS has been seeking reform of those provisions of the State Environmental Planning Policy which unreasonably restrict the development of schools. Up until the time of the resignation of Premier Iemma, it appeared that amendments favourable to the concerns of CEC and AIS would be supported by the then Minister for Planning, Frank Sartor. Recent discussions with relevant Department of Planning officials now indicate that the amendments to planning procedures will in the main apply to government schools with a lesser range of provisions for non-government schools. The changes will allow some building projects to proceed more quickly through local government approval mechanisms.

The CEC and AIS have jointly written to Premier Rees seeking his intervention to ensure that proposed Planning amendments apply equally to government and non-government schools. Joint AIS and CEC correspondence with the Premier will be tabled at the 19 November 2008 Commission meeting.

The CEC has also responded to the Department of Planning on draft proposals sent for comment by the Department at very short notice.

20) “Schools First” Private Funding for Schools

A joint initiative between National Australia Bank, ACER and philanthropic groups Australia Cares and the Foundation for Young Australians will provide $5million every year for an initial three years. Awards will be divided into three types: regional awards worth up $50,000; state awards worth up to $100,000; and a national award worth between $500,000 and $1million. Under the initiative schools will be encouraged to enter into partnerships with community groups and local businesses.

Those that create programs that boost performance will be eligible for awards ranging between $50,000 and $1million. Further advice on this initiative will be provided as it becomes available.

HREOC has commenced a review of legal provisions which impact “Freedom of Religion and Belief in the 21st Century”. The closing date for initial submissions is 31 January 2009.

The inquiry process will end with a HREOC report to the Australian government in early 2010. CEC will input to the Inquiry through the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. An Inquiry discussion paper is available from the HREOC website.

22) Commission 300th Meeting

This meeting was the 300th of the Commission. The first meeting occurred on 28 February 1975. The Commission was then chaired by Archbishop James Carroll. The CEC was established at that time to execute grant contracts to facilitate the flow of Commonwealth and NSW State grants to NSW Catholic schools. Since that time, the CEC’s mandate has been expanded to include advocacy and representation as well as management of certain targeted education programs. The Commission will celebrate this milestone with past Commissioners in March 2009.

John Kitney
Secretary to the Commission
6 November 2008