1. **Draft Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal Report into Council Rates**

The NSW Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) has recommended changes to the system of setting council rates. The most significant aspect for the faith-based sector is a recommendation to grant rate exemptions on the basis of land use rather than ownership - a change that could impact schools and church-owned properties.

IPART began to review the system on which council rates are based in April 2016. The review examined all aspects of how rates are set and levied to create a more sustainable and equitable system for the new era of merged councils. CECNSW lodged a submission on behalf of NSW Catholic schools, arguing that rate exemptions for all government and non-government schools be retained.

IPART released a draft report in August 2016 with 34 recommendations. The most significant changes proposed are:

- determine rate exemptions on the basis of land use rather than ownership (Recommendation 10);
- retain rate exemptions “for land used by a religious body occupied for that purpose” (Recommendation 11);
- remove exemptions for land managed by the Teacher Housing Authority and on which a house is erected (Recommendation 13);
- where a portion of land is used for an exempt purpose and the rest for a non-exempt activity, only the former portion should be exempt, and the remainder should be rateable (Recommendation 15); and
- where land is used for an exempt purpose part of the time, a self-assessment process should be used to determine the proportion of rates payable for the non-exempt use (Recommendation 16).

Commissioners noted that IPART believes that schools (and hospitals) should continue to be exempt from paying rates, and that religious and charitable bodies should also qualify for exemptions if they conduct "activities that provide substantial public benefits to the community... Requiring them to pay rates may result in them reducing their services below a socially optimal level."

Commissioners noted that the CECNSW lodged a supplementary submission arguing for the rates exemption to be retained for teacher housing in remote and regional areas. Teacher housing is strongly linked to recruiting efforts in remote and regional areas. A subsidised or rent-free home is one of the few incentives a Catholic schools’ authority can offer to prospective teachers and principals.

The Armidale and Wilcannia-Forbes Catholic Schools Authorities collectively maintain 27 residences for teachers.
2. **NSW Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2017 to 2020**

Commissioners discussed the NSW Literacy and Numeracy Strategy on several occasions in 2016. At their 24 August 2016 meeting, Commissioners agreed that NSW Catholic schools should participate in the NSW Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2017 – 2020, noting its K-10 coverage.

On 21 September 2016, the Premier and Education Minister announced the NSW Literacy and Numeracy Action Plan 2017-2020. Features of the new 2017-2020 strategy are:

1. Continuing focus on K-2 instructional leadership;
2. Development of K-10 literacy and numeracy progressions;
3. A new ‘Best Start’ to year 7 literacy and numeracy; and
4. A focus on the skills of graduating teachers.

All elements of the Strategy are being coordinated by the NSW Literacy and Numeracy Working Group. This Group has representatives from the three school education sectors, BOSTES and the Minister’s Office. Rosalie Nott is the CECNSW representative.

In continuing the K-2 Action Plan for another four years, the Government intends to provide $42.5 million to the Catholic Education Commission NSW. The funds will create additional 70FTE literacy and numeracy instructional leadership positions in 99 Catholic schools which have been targeted by reference to results in the bottom two bands of NAPLAN.

CECNSW has received a draft agreement for the 2017-2020 K-2 initiative. The Agreement is based on the Principles document which was agreed by Commissioners at their 29 July 2016 meeting. The Education Policy Committee and the Diocesan Action Plan Managers recommend that the Commission should sign the Agreement.

Commissioners noted that there are several aspects to the NSW Government’s Literacy and Numeracy Action Plan initiative, since its commencement in 2012 and now in this second phase, which can explain the impact of the Phase 1 initiative; they include:

- the Plan’s strong alignment with Diocesan authorities’ priorities and school improvement processes;
- focus on student learning, classroom practice and school leadership rather than funding amounts; and
- capacity to address local needs while maintaining fidelity to the Action Plan priorities.

It was suggested that the overarching approach of the NSW Literacy and Numeracy Action Plan could provide a model for future policy work related to the principles of school funding.

In addition, it was noted that the NSW Government has agreed to develop complementary literacy and numeracy resources for parents.

The CECNSW re-engineered the 2016 August Census process to collect unit-level data rather than amalgamated data and this process was implemented in half of the dioceses, as follows:

- Unit-level data was provided by Diocesan Offices who had previously collected census data by having staff at each of their schools aggregate the enrolment data into the numerous categories required by AGDET and entering this amalgamated data onto the CECNSW Census website;
- Other Dioceses who had previously used a system for extracting the census data from their own databases and uploading this data on to the Commonwealth Census themselves were advised to continue to do so in 2016; and
- Also, 34 out of 46 Congregational schools chose to submit their Census data in unit-level form and, for 13 of these, the CECNSW uploaded data to the Commonwealth Census on their behalf.

The outcome of the process was:

- increased accuracy according to AGDET feedback;
- decreased workload reported by schools;
- moderate increase in workload for Diocesan staff in the initial set up phase – once established the workload is expected to be reduced; and
- the Census data was submitted to the Commonwealth well within the deadline.

Apart from efficiency benefits, access to unit level data also provides major benefits in terms of data analysis.

Commissioners noted advice from AGDET’s Director of Recurrent Grants Assistance for Schools that the NSW Catholic Schools system had the lowest error rate in the August 2016 census collection. Commissioners also noted that key people in the dioceses gave positive feedback to the process.

Commissioners noted future plans for implementing the 2016 process include:

- using the process to collect data for the February State per Capita,
- expanding the process to include all systemic schools in the 2017 August Census, and working with CEnet to deliver the process in an automated manner in the medium term.

4. Commission Endorsements

The Commission:

- approved the extension of Committee terms to 31 December 2017 for all those members whose terms were scheduled to cease on 31 December 2016;
- endorsed CECNSW’s submission to the Department of Industry on apprenticeships and traineeships in NSW; and
- noted the financial report of the CECNSW Secretariat for the seven months to 30 September 2016.
5. Governance Training and Mapping

At their 23 August 2016 meeting, Commissioners requested that the totality of Catholic sector governance training options be mapped and advised to Commissioners, e.g. all Governance Training offered by all NSW Catholic Schools Authorities be identified and communicated’.

Eleven dioceses and 11 congregational schools (22 in all) submitted returns through an online survey. Multiple online survey responses from some dioceses and schools were aggregated into one response per Catholic School Authority. The nine BOSTES Governance elements and Risk Management were the two most popular training agendas.

**In-house training** – 4 dioceses and 2 congregational schools have developed and delivered their own group training. Sydney, Broken Bay and Maitland-Newcastle are BOSTES accredited governance trainers; Canberra-Goulburn, while not accredited with BOSTES, has also conducted its own group training. Good Samaritan Education has a well-developed governance model and provided training to two of its schools in this survey.

**Third Party training** – 11 dioceses and 8 congregational schools used third party training providers to deliver a mix of online and group training in 2016. CECNSW was the most popular third party trainer followed by the AIS and to a lesser extent Complispace and the Australian Institute of Company Directors (AICD). Most dioceses and schools recommended their third party trainers: CECNSW online governance training modules; AIS symposium or seminar; Complispace or AICD group training.

**Sharing and receiving** – 3 accredited dioceses (Sydney, Broken Bay and Maitland-Newcastle) offered to share their in-house developed training with other Catholic Schools Authorities, and 6 dioceses and 8 Congregational schools indicated interest in receiving governance training developed by other Catholic Schools Authorities.

Commissioners noted that:

- Governance Training is an ongoing statutory requirement for good school management. The new NSW Education Standards Authority will have a more standards based approach to school regulation and a requirement for school authorities (owners) to manage their risks in relation to registration and compliance. Risk Management is now a key compliance and governance requirement for all NSW Catholic Schools Authorities.

- There are opportunities for NSW Catholic Schools Authorities to share their 2016 governance training experiences, both in-house and third party, to provide a mix of governance training platforms and so vary the delivery of this essential training to more Responsible Persons in 2017.


The bill to amend the Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards Act 2013, the Education Act 1990 and the Teacher Accreditation Act 2004 with respect to the constitution and functions of the NSW Education Standards Authority was passed without amendment by both Houses of the NSW Parliament on 12 October 2014 and is now awaiting Assent. The Bill has been supported by CECNSW though there were some reservations about "inspections without notice". The government has assured CECNSW that inspections will be appropriately managed by being made explicitly subject to direction (oversight) of the new Board. The Bill is available at [https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/bills/DBAssets/bills/BillText/3335/b2016-101-d14-House.pdf](https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/bills/DBAssets/bills/BillText/3335/b2016-101-d14-House.pdf).
7. **2017 Strategic Directions and Workplan**

Consistent with its obligations to the NSW and ACT Bishops, the Commission is required to present a Work plan to the Bishops for approval in November each year (Charter 3.10). The Charter’s obligations outline the routine work of the Commission and the Secretariat in advocacy, consultation, distribution of funding and compliance as well as the management of the Secretariat itself. More recently, the Commission has requested that the Work plan be constituted as a response to identified Strategic Directions. The Draft Strategic Directions and Work plan have been developed by Secretariat Directors and other staff.

The Strategic Directions and Work plan 2017 identifies key strategic issues and associated strategic responses of the Commission. Each Strategic Area of Focus is contextualised and Operational Secretariat Responses are provided. The Service Delivery to Dioceses and Schools are separately listed, detailing the Commission’s and the Secretariat’s responses by Service Delivery area.

At their meeting on 21 September 2016 meeting, Commissioners noted and agreed *in principle* to the proposed key strategic areas as follows:

- Preservation of the Religious Character of NSW Catholic schools;
- Compliance in the Distribution and Accountability for Commonwealth and State Funding by NSW Catholic schools;
- Transparent Financial Transactions by Dioceses and Schools;
- Transition to a new Catholic Entity for Catholic education in NSW/ACT;
- A Plan for Future Enrolments in Catholic schools in NSW/ACT; and
- Teachers and System Performance.

Commissioners reviewed the document and requested a number of clarifications to be submitted to their 19 October 2016 meeting. Commissioners also requested that new tasks be separately identified and costed for 2017.

8. **Media Comment on NSW Catholic School Funding – Issues Arising**

The rate of media enquiries focusing on funding to non-government schools has been rising for some time. Public school advocates are now highlighting suburb-by-suburb and town-by-town examples of non-government schools (usually Catholic schools) receiving more government funding on a per-student basis than the nearby government school. The National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) has responded from a national perspective to some of these reports.

Catholic Education Commission NSW believes all schools should be funded according to need, rather than sector. We support a strong and well-funded public schools sector. We do not believe in pitting sector against sector because all Australian children are entitled to well-resourced school education.

9. **School Communities Working Together Conference**

On 29 September 2019 a one-day conference was held in Sydney on managing violent extremism in NSW schools. Speakers came from NSW Police, Federal Police and other agencies including from the Muslim community. Catholic schools were represented by members of the Secretariat and colleagues from the Dioceses of Parramatta and Wollongong. The aim of the conference was to promote a more complete understanding of the nature of the threats posed by violent extremism.

For schools, the quality of relationships between students and staff is critical. Noticing changed attitudes and behaviours is fundamental to effective intervention. The NSW School Communities *Working Together* approach is based on solid research and overseas experience.
10. CECNSW Resilience Australia Award

On 12 October 2016, at Parliament House, the Resilient Australia, NSW, Awards were held. CECNSW and Winmalee Rural Fire Brigade were the joint recipients of the Schools Award: https://www.emergency.nsw.gov.au/emsector/awards/resilient-australia-awards/2016-nsw-winners.html

CECNSW and Winmalee Brigade received the award for the Hawkesbury Road Project, a methodology in emergency services work with local schools to develop emergency plans. This approach was developed by Tony McArthur, CECNSW and Winmalee Rural Fire Brigade and Alan Holley, Winmalee Rural Fire Brigade to meet a need identified in 2012. The training they delivered assisted St Columba’s College and St Thomas Aquinas School when they were faced by the Linksview Fire on 17 October 2013. The award was presented by Deputy Premier Troy Grant and Minister for Emergency Services, David Elliott. CECNSW were represented by John Kitney and Tony McArthur.

CECNSW will undertake an audit to confirm that all dioceses have implemented learnings from the Linkview training into their emergency procedures.

11. NSW Legislative Council: Child Protection Inquiry

In July 2016, CECNSW provided a written submission to the Legislative Council Inquiry into Child Protection. This Inquiry is chiefly concerned with the operations of the Department of Family and Community Services. On 26 September 2016, three Catholic school sector representatives attended the public hearing (Peter Grace – CECNSW, Roseanne Plunkett – CatholicCare Wollongong, and Tamara Hughes – Catholic Schools Office, Diocese of Broken Bay). Peter and Roseanne are members of the Catholic Education and Social Services Coordinating Committee (CESSCC) and Tamara is the Chair of the Diocesan Directors’ Catholic Systemic Schools’ Child Protection Practitioners’ Group (CSSCPPG). At the hearing, the Standing Committee placed a number of questions on notice for which CECNSW is co-ordinating a response. A full report will be provided to Commissioners at their 30 November 2016 meeting.

John Kitney
Commission Secretary
11 November 2016
12. Briefing by the Catholic Block Grant Authority with BGA Delegate

**CAPITAL GRANTS**

The annual schedules of recommended capital grant projects were submitted to the Australian and State Ministers of Education as required by 30 September, 2016.

The CBGA keeps an active interest in ensuring that the funding on all projects is not delayed, and that grant payments are maximised in accordance with the terms and conditions of the grant offer.

**PROPOSED CHANGES TO FUTURE ASSESSMENT AND PRIORITISATION OF APPLICATIONS**

The Annual General Meeting of the State Priority Committee (SPC) will be held on 10 November 2016. The AGM will consider proposals to change the following:

1. the introduction of a two-stage application (“gating”) process;
2. assessing educational disadvantage; and
3. determining grant and local contributions.

Actions relating to these initiatives will be reported to the next Commission meeting in November 2016.

John Kitney  
Commission Secretary  
11 November 2016