

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

PRESS RELEASE 569#

HARPER COMPETITION REVIEW:

CONCEPT OF PUBLIC EDUCATION THREATENED BY COMPETITION AT ANY PRICE

Since their establishment in the nineteenth century, Public Education Departments, with their ability to

- train, pay, and supervise teachers for both city and country schools;
- ensure resources for both urban and remote areas; and
- with their objective of equal opportunity for all –

have been under constant attack from religious and profiteering competitors.

The undermining of *free, secular and universal education for all* has always been the objective of religious institutions like the Catholic Church – itself a highly centralised bureaucracy.

But the new right ideology of consumer choice’ which treats education as a ‘commodity’ rather than a ‘right’ together with ‘competition at all cost’ has been given further legitimacy by the recent **Harper Competition Review**.

This wide-ranging draft report lists 52 recommendations spanning the entire Australian economy. Overall it recommends anti-competitive regulation be comprehensively reviewed and streamlined, and the principle of competition applied beyond the commercial sector to the provision of government services. It calls for the creation of a new body, the Australian Council for Competition Policy, to work alongside the existing Australian Competition and Consumer Commission.

Small Business Minister Bruce Billson HAS welcomed the report. He said it would “identify ways to build the economy and promote durable benefits to consumers It needs to be thoroughly tested via further public consultations before final recommendations are made by the Review Panel.”

There has been Media discussion concerning the extension of retail trading hours, but **little reaction to recommendations in the area of human Services**. But the report ignores the growing inequalities caused by ‘competition’ policy in education and recommends more of the same.

The Harper report recommends:

Deepening and extending access to high quality “human services” (such as education, health care, aged care and community services) as an important focus for competition policy.

The Draft Report further recommends that a national framework be developed, with agreement between the Commonwealth and State and Territory governments establishing choice and competition principles in the field of human services, with guiding principles including that:

- user choice should be placed at the heart of service delivery;
- funding, regulation and service delivery should be separate;
- a diversity of providers should be encouraged, while not crowding out community and voluntary services; and
- innovation in service provision should be stimulated, while ensuring access to high-quality human services

DOGS consider that competition policy is the ideology of a craven irresponsible government trying to punch above its weight on the crumbling World Trade Organisation (WTO) Stage.

DOGS reject the concept of ‘competition’ at all costs in education, with the gross inequalities in educational provision it has imposed on our nation’s children – at public expense. Competition policy in practice means privatising the profits and socialising the losses.

Education is not a commodity, the plaything of profiteers and religious men peddling the first class ticket to heaven and the good job- or any job for that matter.

It is a basic human ‘right’ for the children of our taxpaying citizens and should be available to all in public institutions that are free, secular and universal. It is a national endowment, a basic common good, the cornerstone of a healthy democracy.

For further information see: <http://www.tglaw.com.au/awms/Upload/Competition%20Alert%20-%20Harper%20Review%20Draft%20Report%20-%20Opportunities%20for%20Submissions%20-%20Sept%202014.pdf>

And <https://www.accc.gov.au/media-release/accc-welcomes-harper-competition-review-draft-report>

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