**ATTACHMENT G**

**Submission on how to get our message across at State Schools without offending various education departments’ policies on “age appropriateness” and “sensitivity**”

One apparent impediment making it difficult for Church authorities to allow their catechists to teach what should be taught in State schools is the fear of losing its right to give catechism lessons within the State school system.

Although Church authorities send in a curriculum to the Department of Education for its perusal, the curriculum tells the Department very little in detail of what will be taught. This does not really remove this problem for Church authorities. The Department uses the strategy of placing the onus on Church authorities to see that what they teach is “age appropriate” and “sensitive”. If a complaint is received from a parent, then the Church authorities are deemed to have failed to meet this onus. It is a strategy which places the Church under great stress.

We have recently witnessed how the issue of age appropriateness and parent sensitivity was handled in the case of the Safe Schools program. In answer to complaints from parents and the community, an investigation was held. It was decided that age appropriateness and sensitivity of the various lessons and posters was a matter for the professional judgement of teachers. There is no threat to this program from the direction of parental sensitivity. Parents do not have a say. The course will stay no matter whose parents are offended and offended many parents are going to be.

We cannot get the Department to adopt a similar approach to Catechist lessons. However, the solution is very simple. If the onus of proving age appropriateness and sensitivity is causing a problem, then the onus should be moved away from Church authorities.

The sacramental programs are conducted in the parish and not in the state schools. So, what is taught in the parish is not of concern to the Education Department. The children’s parents would be told before sacramental programs are commenced what was going to be taught. It would be explained to parents that children mature at different rates and it may be that a discussion of death (the Crucifixion), mortal sin and hell that may worry some children, but not others. We would explain that we leave this judgement to parents to decide if their children are ready to be taught about these things. If they are not sure, they have the option of deferring first reception of the sacraments until a subsequent year. To enter each sacramental program, parents would sign an agreement that the children will be taught what is in the programs, which includes discussion of death, mortal sin and hell and in subsequent catechism classes in state schools. So we would have, in effect, a waiver in the case of any complaints (waiver would not be mentioned in the agreement). The response to any complaint to the Department would be that the parents authorised the lessons for their child. I doubt that very many, if any parents, would not sign the agreement.

However, under the assumption that a few parents may defer the receipt of the sacraments and not sign an agreement, at the beginning of each catechist year, a letter would be sent to all parents in a particular class advising that, in specified lessons, mortal sin, death, the crucifixion or hell will be discussed and that they have the option of not allowing their child to attend these lessons. Parents would be told that, if they think particular lessons are inappropriate for their children, they should please telephone the parish office now and say so. If they require further information about the lessons, the parish office can show them the lessons. Those children who have not received the sacraments and those parents who have contacted the parish office, would be contacted before each of these lessons and again warned of the lesson content. The parents can then instruct their children not to attend that lesson.

By passing the onus of deciding what is taught to each child to the parents, the whole problem of age appropriateness and sensitivity is solved or drastically reduced

The diocesan policy says that no child will be unreasonably denied the reception of the sacrament for the first time. However, in this case, no child will be denied. It is the parents who would be the decision makers and this is how it should be.

If this policy were followed, it is extremely doubtful that any complaint would be received by education departments from parents.