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Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care

To whom it may concern,

I read with interest the inclusion of a Royal Commission to evaluate the need for progression of care for children particularly in the first 1000 days of life. I have a good understanding of the strong benefits to children accessing education based play and the social and emotional benefits particularly for children who may not be able to enjoy stability and growth at home.

I am writing this letter in the hope that your commission will also hear the stresses that many communities are feeling over the introduction of a program for three year olds from 2026. Your community guide states that currently approximately 22% of early years children live in regional areas. I am going to give some idea of the stress for my town alone, knowing that many of the neighbouring towns are in a similar situation.

I live in Tumby Bay. I do not work in the Education or Child Care industry but I have a 16 year old who attended Kindergarten here, and child care in Adelaide before that. I also have a 4 year old attending the Rural Care provided on our Kindy site and will be starting Kindy in 2023. I am also a long standing member of our School Governing Council, currently the Chair.

Our kindy provides education to 4 year olds on the same site as the Rural Care program but separate to the R to 12 Area School, there is no other child care available. Kindy utilises its 15 hours with a Tuesday and Thursday 8.30am to 3pm, and a Wednesday 1pm to 3pm. On the days that kindy is attended the Rural Care can only take limited bookings because of site capacity requirements. There are long wait lists for child care in our district. On Mondays and Fridays Rural Care can take more children, as they offer a 3- worker childcare program.

Our kindy site runs very close to capacity every year. It would not be viable to add a whole other 'class' of 3 year olds on the same day. The 3 year old program would then have to occupy the alternate days of Monday and Friday. It could be argued here that the overflow of 3 year olds being removed from the need for child care would balance the care placements required out but these figures do not work.

The theory falls apart at a financial base first. Care centres need more staff per child for 2 year olds and under. The current 3 year olds (and 4's on non-kindy days) are helping float these not for profit situations (Rural Care is run by DECD). They are charged the same day rate at the toddlers and babies but the centres can carry bigger numbers of older children. I strongly believe our centre would struggle financially with smaller numbers. Our community has struggled for many years with lack of child care spaces. With no room to expand the centre the idea had been passed around that the Kindy could develop a space adjacent to the school with the double benefit of the kindy and Junior Primary having more cross over experiences. This would leave the Rural Care site as a stand alone centre, and I am unsure of the legalities of this regarding management for a site alone. To build a new centre and surrounding landscaping would cost millions but is a worthy investment. Any

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changes like this would need to begin now to be ready in 2026 with planning, drawing, building and landscaping.

I am asking you to ***please*** consult with rural communities and the management and staff of schools, kindergartens and care centres about the functionality of how the introduction of 3 year olds from 2026 will work. There is no doubt from any education worker I have spoken to in the last few years about play based education being a benefit for young minds. But no one here can see how it is going to work without major facility changes.

I will keep myself informed with your email subscription for newsletters. I would greatly appreciate if there was representation from Tumby Bay and Cummins (as a neighbouring town in very similar circumstance) in some of your discussions. The staff in our schools and centres here have a wealth of passion and knowledge that could help the Commission towards the best results for our youngest citizens.

Kind regards

Samantha Stasinowsky

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