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of NSW & ACT

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## Feedback from May 2021 Assembly Small Group Discussion *Regarding increased church Administration and Compliance*

In response to a letter received by the May 2021 Assembly from Tahmoor Baptist Church regarding this matter, small group discussion was held to provide an opportunity for delegates to feedback on perceived challenges in this area and what could be done about them. The responses of each group was collated and what follows is a summary of the main themes emerging.

The main areas of concern around increased compliance included Safe Church compliance, SRE Authorisation, Work Health and Safety, and general church governance compliance matters. For some, there was a fear of a negative impact on ministry and volunteering due to the increased compliance. It was also clear that many churches were needing to devote significant resources to these areas and these resources were not always readily available.

*Given the huge lift in expectations from government and society in general in these areas in recent years, it is understandable that the increased commitment to these areas is proving challenging for some churches. In a number of areas (eg Safe Church), the policies and processes that have been put in place by the Association reflect the relevant legislation and have been prepared to assist churches meet their responsibilities. They also reflect our sense of mission around good governance and protection of the vulnerable. These resources and processes are under regular review and the feedback from Assembly is being worked through as such reviews take place.*

The second main area discussed in the groups was: **What would help?** How can we together as an Association come beside one another and assist?

One main theme that emerged was the possible provision of external resourcing to churches in the areas of compliance. Several suggestions were common, including:

- A compliance advisory/coordination service provided by the Association that churches could engage if they wished (similar to Balance Ministry Services which currently assists churches with their financial responsibilities).
- Support hubs perhaps in regions, and/or a helpline.
- Curating or providing consultancy services to churches in various areas including websites/digital presence, legal, WHS, and property/development.
- A centrally managed online document storage service that could assist with keeping records, especially confidential ones that need to be kept for a long time.

A number of other suggestions were made which are already available, such as sample templates for job descriptions, training and seminars, and guidance around what priorities to work on first. The recognition of the need of translation of communication and documents was also noted.

Finally, the idea of coordinating resource sharing among churches was mentioned multiple times.

*Discussion is underway in respect of how the Association may be able to coordinate assistance in these areas. Some are being explored in the short term – such as connecting interested church leaders/volunteers with a forum/working group to share ideas and resources in these areas. Others require more planning and resourcing. Further information will be made available in the new year.*