



STATEMENT OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS AND RELIGIOUS LEADERS ON RELEASE OF FINAL REPORT OF ROYAL COMMISSION

December 15 2017

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse has today released its final report, which includes a large number of recommendations, many of which will have a significant impact on the way the Catholic Church operates in Australia.

President of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, Archbishop Denis Hart, said the release of the final report is the culmination of almost five years of intense examination of the way in which many different institutions, including the Catholic Church, have historically failed children.

“This is a shameful past, in which a prevailing culture of secrecy and self-protection led to unnecessary suffering for many victims and their families,” Archbishop Hart said.

“Once again I reiterate my unconditional apology for this suffering and a commitment to ensuring justice for those affected.”

Sister Ruth Durick OSU, president of Catholic Religious Australia, said religious orders across Australia are committed to continuing the work of recent years to ensure a future in which the safety and protection of children and vulnerable adults is paramount.

“We acknowledge with gratitude the courage of all those survivors who have come forward to the Royal Commission,” Sr Ruth said.

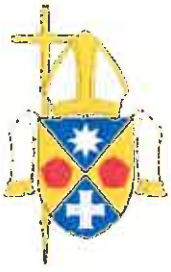
“We will be taking very seriously the Royal Commission's report and have commissioned an initial assessment of its findings by the Truth, Justice and Healing Council. We expect the TJHC assessment to be completed early in 2018.”

Both leaders said the Church will continue to push for the introduction of a national redress scheme for the survivors of child sexual abuse in which the Church will participate.

“The success of this scheme lies with the cooperation of the state governments. Without their involvement, national coverage will be impossible,” they said.

“It is now time for state governments to act.”

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Statement regarding Royal Commission final report

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse has today released its final report.

Bishop of Sandhurst Les Tomlinson said the report will make for distressing reading.

"The release today of the Royal Commission report into Child Sexual Abuse is deeply distressing for survivors, the wider community and the Church," he said.

"I have not yet read the full report, however during the past five years I have watched as the Royal Commission has unfolded and, like all of us, have been deeply shocked and saddened by the abuse carried out by priests, religious and lay people. It is with a great sense of humility and sadness that I read this report.

"The work of the Royal Commission, together with the courage of the survivors, has already brought about change, and the Church is continuing to work diligently to ensure these failures are never repeated.

"It is now time for a renewed focus on child and vulnerable adult protections. There have been significant reforms over the past years and it is now the responsibility of the Church to continue this work.

"The Diocese of Sandhurst, through its leadership, has committed to the necessary changes, ensuring that children are as safe as they can possibly be in all schools and parishes.

"By way of tangible example significant improvements to strengthen the child safety focus of the Diocese of Sandhurst to date have included:

- Reviewed and introduced new policies and procedures;
- Education through mandatory child safety training programs for clergy, staff and volunteers;
- New roles and responsibilities including the appointment of a Diocesan Child Safety Officer;
- Increased staffing and resources highlighting child protection activities with a dedicated Professional Standards Committee to respond to complaints against people; and
- Progressing with the implementation of the new Victorian Child Safe Legislation.

"I would like to state my support for the apology given earlier today on behalf of the Catholic Church in Australia by Archbishop Denis Hart, in which he once again reiterated an unconditional apology for this suffering and a commitment to ensuring justice for those affected."

Bishop Les Tomlinson DD

Bishop of Sandhurst

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