



## AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

### Church continues to strengthen child safety practices

**Media Release**

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The Catholic Church in Australia has made significant progress in responding to the Royal Commission into child sexual abuse, Archbishop Mark Coleridge said today on the anniversary of the National Apology to survivors and victims.

On October 22 last year, Prime Minister Scott Morrison and then-Opposition Leader Bill Shorten delivered apologies on behalf of the Australian people to those who were sexually abused as children. They followed the final report of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, published in December 2017.

Archbishop Coleridge, the president of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, said the Church's ongoing response to its "shameful" history has marked major milestones in the past year.

"The Church's work to implement and maintain child-safe practices and environments started before the Royal Commission was announced, but the need to respond to its recommendations has given our work great impetus," he said.

Archbishop Coleridge pointed to some important achievements and initiatives in the time since the Prime Minister's apology.

"Of the 35 Catholic dioceses, all but one has joined the National Redress Scheme, fulfilling a commitment made during the Royal Commission," he said.

"That means more than 99.5 per cent of diocesan ministries, including parishes and diocesan schools, are participating in this important initiative. The remaining diocese plans to join the scheme soon."

In May, the Bishops Conference and Catholic Religious Australia approved the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards, which complement and augment other safeguarding standards in place across the country.

"Catholic Professional Standards Limited, which developed the standards with key stakeholders, including children, has begun the process of auditing dioceses, religious congregations and other Church entities to assess how well they comply with those standards," Archbishop Coleridge said.

Those audits are being published online.

"Work is progressing on a review of Church governance, as well as the development of new national policy guidelines to strengthen and standardise Church authorities' responses to historical and contemporary concerns and allegations of abuse," Archbishop Coleridge said.

He said the Bishops Conference, along with other key peak organisations within the Church, would publish a comprehensive report in the coming weeks outlining how Catholic dioceses, religious congregations and other ministries are responding to the Royal Commission.

That report, lodged annually with the National Office for Child Safety in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, is itself responding to one of the Royal Commission recommendations.

"Much has happened to strengthen the Church's response to child sexual abuse, including over the past year, and the hard work at the local, state and national level continues. There is much still to be done," Archbishop Coleridge concluded.