

Royal Commission Case Study 50

Catholic Church Final Hearing



Friday 10 February 2017 – Day 5

The Commission started Day 5 of Case Study 50 hearing evidence from Ms Teresa Devlin, Chief Executive Officer of the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland.

Ms Devlin told the Commission about the operations of the Safeguarding Board since its establishment in 2009.

She told the Commission the Board receives its core funding from Church authorities but also self-funds through payments for training courses and other services it provides. She said that despite the funding arrangements she considered the Board to have effective independence from the Church.

Ms Devlin said that the Board had established a Case Management Committee in response to a key concern the Board discovered in its early years, that the management of abuse claims was inconsistent across the Church in Ireland. The Committee's role is to provide advice to Church authorities that ensured the consistent management of such claims.

The Committee provides advice to bishops and religious leaders in relation to steps taken following receipt of a complaint against a priest or member of the order, including whether a priest or religious should be stood down following a complaint. She said if the bishop does not follow that advice they are asked to explain in writing why the advice was not followed. She said in 99 percent of cases church leaders do follow the Board's advice.

Ms Devlin said she had found the Canon law process provided an effective framework for investigation of a claim, particularly if an accused person had been acquitted in civil criminal proceedings.

She told the Commission that the Committee expected complete openness from Church authorities when advising them on the conduct of a claim. The Board asks the relevant church authority to confirm in writing that they have 'given them everything' in relation to the case. She said as far as she is concerned 'there are no secret archives'.

She said a key objective for the Board is to provide a consistent approach across Ireland to the management of child sexual abuse claims based on civil law, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Canon law and the Gospels.

She told the Commission the Board had established Standards relating to quality assurance and monitoring of child safeguarding practice within dioceses and congregations. This is achieved through a combination of internal self-audits and external independent audits which are compiled into a review by the Board and provided to the relevant Church authority who commits to making the report public.

She said that the Board being able to require a Church authority to provide it with all details of child abuse claims and then for this information to be made public is a ‘huge cultural shift’ in the Church in Ireland.

‘There is no doubt children are safer in the Catholic Church [in Ireland] than they have ever been. My worry is complacency. I don’t want anyone to think they can stop being vigilant,’ she told the Commission.

The hearing continues on Monday.

CONTACT: Michael Salmon, Communications Director, 0417 495 018