

Redress hurdles and international child sex abuse research report

Francis Sullivan 19 September 2017

The Australian's John Ferguson has recently written extensively about the proposed national redress scheme for child sexual abuse survivors, its hurdles and where it is headed.

In three articles he has identified several potential issues with the proposed scheme and highlighted some of the concerns both private and public institutions claim to have.

The issues around how it will be operated, insurances, total costs, levels of proof, access and many others will all need to be sorted out as the draft bill is finalised, the legislation is presented to the Parliament and the likely Senate review process takes place.

What is really missing at the moment, however, is a firm commitment, particularly from the state governments, that they will be part of a scheme.

For decades survivors of child sexual abuse have been calling out for a redress scheme that provides a fair and compassionate response to the abuse they have suffered.

The Royal Commission has shown us nothing if not that institutions responsible for child sexual abuse have, for the most part, failed in delivering consistent redress nation-wide for survivors.

Certainly within the Catholic Church different dioceses and orders have treated survivors differently depending on where and when they were abused.

A national redress scheme, aligned in broad terms with that proposed by the Royal Commission, would address many of the current problems and issues associated with redress for abuse survivors.

On another issue, a major research project into abuse in the Catholic Church was released last week.

It has pulled together the findings of 26 royal commissions, police investigations, judicial probes, government inquiries, church studies, and academic research from around the world since 1985.

And while it has found the worst of the sexual abuse scandal may be over in Australia, in the Catholic Church in other parts of the world, including the Church in Asia, Africa and parts of Europe, children are still potentially in danger.

The RMIT study out of Melbourne, *Child Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church*, examined reports from Australia, Ireland, the United States, Britain, Canada and the Netherlands and found that one in 15 priests, or about 7 per cent, allegedly abused children and teenagers between about 1950 and 2000.

This figure is consistent with the data collected by the Royal Commission and released during its final hearing into the Catholic Church in February this year.

The study's co-author, Professor Des Cahill, is reported as saying child sexual abuse has peaked and there has been a decline since the late 70s and early 80s.

Professor Cahill believes the risks to children in Australian Catholic schools is now very low, mainly because of greater vigilance by parents, teachers and school authorities.