

Vital days for success of national redress

Francis Sullivan 16 November 2017

In this historic week of the same sex marriage postal result we are hopefully advancing another important social commitment.

The Commonwealth, through Social Services Minister Christian Porter, convened a series of meetings to advance the national redress scheme. Government and private institutions were again in consultations around the workings of the scheme and the eligibility for victims.

These are vital days for the future success of the scheme.

For the Catholic Church, it all boils down to having constitutional access across the country to the scheme.

I have said it before that the church leaders want a national redress scheme.

They don't want separate state-based schemes but see the value for victims in a single scheme that provides access to independent assessment and application of redress. Redress for victims should not be determined by their postcode.

Currently the aspirations of the church leadership are being hampered by the very fact that state governments need to either opt in to the scheme or at least transfer to the Commonwealth those powers that enable churches and other private institutions within their borders to opt into the scheme.

Once all states comply with either of those options then churches, like the Catholic Church that cover all geographic provinces of the country, can opt in.

Minister Porter is on the record acknowledging that there are still areas of the scheme that need to be settled, costings not the least among them.

There are the rules by which the scheme will operate that are yet to be finalised. There are logistical matters concerning the processing of claims, the verification of allegations and the entrenching of procedural fairness into the administration of the scheme that need to be assured.

So, final decisions to opt in by the states, beyond in-principle aspiration, are still some way off. As it will be for the private institutions.

However, the Royal Commission was left in no doubt that the Catholic Church leadership wanted to participate in a national redress scheme. So, once it is able to do so the rubber will have hit the road!