

Royal Commission Case Study 44

John Joseph Farrell TJHC update



Monday September 12 2016 – Day 1

The Royal Commission's hearing (Case Study 44) into the response of Catholic Church authorities to allegations of child sexual abuse by John Joseph Farrell commenced in Sydney today.

The hearing is also inquiring into the response of the Special Issues Resource Group for the Province of Sydney to allegations against Farrell.

The hearing commenced with Royal Commission Chair, Justice Peter McClellan, providing a statistical update, reporting that in the past three years the Commission has completed case study hearings and provided reports to the Governor-General and Governors in 26 case studies. A further 13 case studies have been conducted and are at various stages of completion.

He said the Commission has received information about abuse occurring in more than 4,000 institutions.

Justice McClellan said that a breakdown of the institutions examined in public hearings reveals that 29 case studies have examined at least one state institution (70% of all case studies), with state institutions examined as a primary institution in 11 case studies.

He said faith-based institutions have been examined in 26 case studies (63% of all case studies). Catholic institutions have been examined in 14 case studies (34% of all case studies) and Anglican institutions have been examined in five case studies (12% of all case studies).

The Commissioners have now met with survivors in 5,866 private sessions and a further 1,616 people have been approved for a private session. It is anticipated that by the time it completes its work at the end of next year the Commission will have held more than 7,200 private sessions.

The current breakdown of institutions in which survivors in private sessions say they have been abused is as follows: 62% of attendees reported abuse in a faith-based institution. Around 27% reported abuse at government-run institutions. Abuse in Catholic institutions was reported by 40% of all private session attendees, abuse in Anglican institutions by 8% of attendees and abuse in Salvation Army institutions by 4% of attendees.

So far the Commission has referred 1,659 matters to police with 71 prosecutions having been commenced.

Following the statement from Justice McClellan and legal argument in relation to issues to be raised in the hearing possibly impacting further criminal proceedings against Farrell that are listed for hearing in April 2017, Senior Counsel Assisting, Gail Furness, told the Commission in an opening statement about Farrell's history of abuse and the response of church leaders in the 1980s and early 1990s.

This included a meeting in September 1992 with Farrell, Monsignor Peters of the Armidale Diocese and representatives of the Special Issues Resources Group, Fathers Lucas and Usher, in which Farrell's offending against children was discussed. Ms Furness told the Commission there are conflicting reports from the priests as to what Farrell had admitted in this meeting.

In July 2012 then Bishop of Parramatta, Anthony Fisher, and Bishop of Armidale, Michael Kennedy, commissioned former Federal Court judge Anthony Whitlam QC to undertake an investigation into Farrell, the response of the two dioceses and the involvement of Fathers Lucas and Usher. The 'Whitlam Report' and its findings will be the subject of questioning during the hearing.

Eighty three-year-old former bishop of Armidale and Parramatta, Kevin Manning, has been excused from appearing in the case study because of a neurological condition which would impact on his ability to give evidence.

The hearing continues tomorrow when two survivor witnesses and the mother of a survivor will give evidence.

Contact: Michael Salmon, Director Communications, 0417 495 018