

Royal Commission Case Study 50

Catholic Church Final Hearing



Thursday 16 February 2017 – Day 9

Senior Counsel Assisting released the full report of the Royal Commission's survey results on claims made against Catholic organisations for alleged child sexual abuse by their personnel, following the release earlier in this hearing of the interim data report.

The morning's panel discussion looked at issues in Catholic Education.

Panel members were Dr Tim McDonald, Executive Director, Catholic Education Western Australia; Mr Peter Hill, Director (Employee Services), Archdiocese of Brisbane Catholic Education; Mr John Crowley, Principal, St Patrick's College Ballarat; and Mr Stephen Elder, Executive Director, Catholic Education Melbourne, Executive Director, Catholic Education Commission of Victoria, and a member of the Truth Justice and Healing Council. All have extensive experience in Catholic Education.

The discussion covered the structure and functions of Catholic education offices and commissions. It also looked at the relationship between relevant diocesan bodies, state departments and other authorities.

The Commission heard about reporting obligations including to the police and to the relevant state department; the role of the Catholic Education office/commission in this process; and whether reporting obligations are the same for employees and diocesan priests.

The hearing examined registration arrangements for teachers – lay and religious; Working With Children Checks and other relevant checks including who is mandated to have a clearance to work with children (volunteers, teachers, chaplains, parish priests); and whether or not it is possible to access files from other states.

There was some discussion about the role of Catholic Professional Standards and changes that might result from the work of that new entity.

Other issues discussed included the extent of involvement of parish priests in programs in Catholic schools and in Victoria, possible issues arising out of the role of parish priest as employer; the relationship of the Catholic education office with the professional standards office and whether or not the Catholic education office has an investigative role in relation to student protection matters.

The Commission also heard about responses to legislative changes in Victoria in response to the *Inquiry into the handling of child abuse by religious and other organisations*, tabled in November 2013.

The panel discussed a school's role in complaints handling and reporting; staff training and professional development; communication with and engagement of the child's parents, police, the school community and the professional standards office; and the sacrament of reconciliation.

Mr Crowley described efforts to engage past pupils and their families affected by abuse, and changes to child safety, curriculum and pastoral care at St Patrick's College Ballarat in light of the history of abuse in the school.

After lunch, the hearing looked at current child safety, complaint handling and risk management.

Panel members were Mr Mark Eustance, Director of Professional Standards for the Catholic Church, Queensland; Ms Claire Pirola, Manager, Office for Safeguarding & Professional Standards, Diocese of Parramatta; Ms Karen Larkman, Director of Safeguarding and Ministerial Integrity Office, Archdiocese of Sydney; Ms Andrea Musulin, Safeguarding Project Officer, Archdiocese of Perth; Mr Sean Tynan, Manager, Zimmerman Services, Diocese of Maitland Newcastle. All are involved in complaint handling.

Panel members described the complaints handling processes they work with, including whether or not they use *Towards Healing*. All are signatories but there's a declining number of people choosing to use the protocol. Panel members discussed the weaknesses and limits, including poor resourcing and implementation.

The panel described the structure of their organisations and lines of accountability; parish structures and the degree of independence of their respective offices; and the relationship with the state professional standards office.

The Commission heard about the Church's national complaints data base; professional development and staff training opportunities which may, or may not be mandatory; processes and policies for reporting to police, including whether or not blind reports are made; and the importance of the exchange of information with other agencies, and especially with the police.

Where relevant, panel members were asked for their view of NSW Ombudsmans reportable conduct scheme, and they acknowledged the importance of their relationship with the Ombudsman, police and the Office of the Children's Guardian.

Mark Eustance described achievements of the Queensland office in the area of child protection, recent changes and the challenges still faced, including in some places a culture of discretion, a lack of willingness to fully disclose and take formal action if concerning information comes to light.

Claire Pirola said even when audits and processes are in place, early indicators of abuse can still be missed. She expressed the need for greater awareness of what constitutes boundary violations and grooming and to intervene early with high risk behavior in adults working with children. She called for a nationally consistent approach; the availability of accurate, public data; and appropriate people in leadership roles to influence cultural change in order to improve the safety of children.

Karen Larkman said safeguarding training for all priests and clergy is mandatory in the Sydney Archdiocese. She has developed a training package based on the Irish model. Challenges include information in general across church authorities.

Andrea Musulin said more work is needed on prevention, detection, and reducing opportunities for offences; and for increased opportunities for families and children to report. She stressed the importance of sex education for young children. She said her greatest achievement in the role is to have installed over 200 fully trained safeguarding officers in Perth parishes. She said her biggest concern is managing risk when there's a known child sex offender in a parish, having served a sentence, and the need for more information around their offending from the police.

Sean Tynan said the key challenges include the use of chapter 16A in NSW which is designed to share information but there are some limitations to that in practice and it needs strengthening. He called for funding to train the trainer to be reinstated.

The hearing was adjourned until 10:00am Monday 20 February.

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