



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

Statement from Archbishop Denis Hart, President, Australian Catholic Bishops Conference at the conclusion of case study 50 of the Royal Commission

24 February 2017

As the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse concludes its final hearing into the Catholic Church, I acknowledge the cooperation of witnesses, agencies, religious institutes and dioceses across the Church in Australia.

I particularly want to acknowledge the bravery of the survivors of child sexual abuse who have given evidence, not just in case studies involving the Catholic Church, but across the more than 50 case studies so far that have examined the many different institutions throughout Australia.

Over the past three weeks, more than 70 Church leaders and professionals have appeared before the Commissioners sharing expertise, identifying failings and describing best practice for the future of our Church structure, culture and governance.

The final hearing discussed many aspects and characteristics of Church and clergy life including: Canon Law, the confessional, celibacy, clericalism, formation, professional support and supervision.

What we have learnt from our involvement in the Royal Commission case studies and our own work in coming to a better understanding of the many different issues that have contributed to child sexual abuse in the Church will inform our future policies and practices.

The work of the Commission staff and the Commissioners themselves has no doubt been gruelling and challenging and, along with the rest of the Australian community, we owe them a debt of gratitude for their years of service.

I also acknowledge the work of Truth, Justice and Healing Council in responding to the Royal Commission on behalf of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and Catholic Religious Australia. Looking ahead, we turn our focus to the newly established Catholic Professional Standards Ltd to ensure child protection standards are set and audited at the highest level.

As the President of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference I make this commitment to the survivors of child sexual abuse, the Catholic and broader community: I will do all within my power to ensure the abuse of the past never happens again, that the reforms my fellow bishops and religious leaders have endorsed over the past years will be implemented. I reiterate that the Catholic Church in Australia will continue to support the survivors of child sexual abuse.

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference looks forward to responding to the final report and recommendations to Government from the Hon Justice Peter McClellan AM, Chair of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, due to be presented at the end of this year.

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