

# THE AUSTRALIAN

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## Get the facts on abuse cases

THE AUSTRALIAN JUNE 21, 2013 12:00AM

**NOT for the first time, the behaviour of a senior officer of Victoria Police is under a cloud, with Deputy Commissioner Graham Ashton accused of giving false evidence to the state's child sex abuse inquiry.**

Peter O'Callaghan, QC, the independent commissioner in charge of the Catholic Church's Melbourne complaints system, has detailed instances where he contacted police and arranged for victims to be interviewed. Some cases resulted in charges being laid. Mr O'Callaghan said that of the 304 complaints made up to June 30 last year, 97 had been reported to police, 115 related to offenders who were dead at the time of the complaint, nine were about offenders who were overseas and he encouraged 76 complainants to go to police.

Such details must seriously worry Mr Ashton, who claimed police had not "had a single referral of a child sexual abuse allegation by the Catholic Church", an assertion repeated in the police submission to the inquiry. Yet former Victoria Police deputy commissioner Ken Jones said in correspondence in 2011 that the force was "very content" with the church's sex abuse complaints system and was "very content that victims are being properly dealt with". The fact that a split has occurred over such a sensitive issue at the highest levels of the force will do nothing to help restore public confidence in police after scandals such as former commissioner Simon Overland leaking secret intelligence from phone taps during Operation Briars, the ineffectiveness of the now defunct Office of Police Integrity, and Mr Overland deliberately bringing forward incomplete and misleading crime statistics on the eve of the 2010 election. Mr O'Callaghan's hitting back in defence of his record, and that of the church, should give confidence to those who have worked hard to put the church's house in order since 1996 and come to terms with the shameful behaviour of some clergy and the cover-ups instigated by previous church authorities. The church, like the Australian Defence Force and other organisations, must be proactive in dealing with abuse. But the sins of some should not destroy the church's reputation for its vast contribution to the nation in healthcare, education and welfare. Not every allegation against it or any other body is necessarily correct. The state inquiry and forthcoming national royal commission must ascertain the facts.