

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse continued its public hearing into Case Study 35 today. The Commission heard from former Regional Education Coordinator Allan Dooley, Bishop Peter Connors and survivor BVC.

### ***Testimony of Allan Dooley***

Allan Dooley was the Regional Education Coordinator for the Catholic Education Office for the region which included Holy Family Primary School, Doveton.

He gave evidence that he was the point of contact for school personnel in relation to problems arising, but did not have the authority to make any changes at the school.

Mr Dooley was asked about the lack of formal investigation of Searson, and admitted that it was within his authority to have ordered such an investigation. He also admitted that, even though he had his doubts about Searson's truthfulness at the time when he denied allegations made against him, he did not convey these doubts to his superiors.

Mr Dooley said that he did not recommend that Searson be removed as Parish Priest because he considered the removal of a Priest to be a matter for the Archdiocese. He said that in hindsight, it seems like an obvious recommendation to have made and could not recall why he did not make it at the time.

On cross-examination by counsel for Mr Sleeman, Mr Dooley conceded that his reports around that time did not include the full detail of all of the incidents involving Searson, including what had happened with survivor Julie Stewart. He agreed that he should have set these out in more detail in the correspondence, but believed that everybody knew what was happening.

### ***Testimony of Bishop Peter Connors***

Bishop Connors was the Vicar General for the Archdiocese of Melbourne under Archbishop Frank Little, and was ordained as Auxiliary Bishop in 1987.

Bishop Connors gave evidence about his role as an advisor to Archbishop Little, both as a Vicar General and an Auxiliary Bishop. He said that Archbishop Little consulted him on some, but not all, matters. He also said that he was not free to discuss confidential matters with anyone, even Auxiliary Bishops.

Bishop Connors was taken through the complaints made to him about Searson's conduct, including the use of a tape recorder in the confessional and having children kneel between his knees during confession. The "standard practice" for dealing with complaints was to speak to the Priest about the allegations. Bishop Connors conceded that he should not have accepted Searson's denials, and that he failed to investigate the complaint with proper diligence.

Bishop Connors was asked a number of questions about the failure to remove Searson as Parish Priest. He said that it was a very difficult process to remove a Priest from ministry. He also said that Archbishop Little had a high opinion of the Priesthood and so was slow to accept the fact that a Priest was offending.

During the testimony of Bishop Connors, Justice McClellan foreshadowed that the Royal Commission may recommend a change to the system so that absolute authority did not rest in the Archbishop.

### ***Testimony of BVC***

BVC began at Holy Family School Doveton in 1987. He became an altar boy in Year 4, and noted that Searson would often straighten BVC's belt when he was getting ready to serve at Mass. BVC testified that Searson started to give him greater responsibility, and that he enjoyed the extra attention. He said he was considering the Priesthood even at that young age.

BVC began to help Searson in his garden, even during school lunch times. At one point, Searson began inviting him into the presbytery. On one occasion, Searson raped him, and this abuse continued for 5 years.

BVC testified that he did not stop serving at Mass or helping in the garden because he was too afraid that someone would ask him why he stopped and he would have to admit the abuse.

Speaking of the effects of the abuse, BVC said that he had to re-learn how to emotionally respond to people. He suffers from obsessive compulsive spasm release disorder, and did not disclose the abuse until 2014.

BVC still considers himself to be Catholic, and says that faith has been a refuge for him.

The Commission resumes on Monday, with further testimony from survivors.