



MEDIA RELEASE

Cardinal George Pell welcomed the release of the report of the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into the Handling of Child Abuse by Religious and Other Non-Government Organisations today.

“The Report is an important document and it offers valuable recommendations to ensure that crimes are reported, children and vulnerable people are better protected, and those who have been hurt can more easily seek justice,” Cardinal Pell said. “I welcome the publication of the Report.”

“The report details some of the serious failures in the way the church dealt with these crimes and responded to victims, especially before the procedural reforms of the mid 1990s. Irreparable damage has been caused.

“By the standards of common decency and by today’s standards, church authorities were not only slow to deal with the abuse, but sometimes did not deal with it in any appropriate way at all. This is indefensible.

“At the beginning of the Inquiry Catholic church leaders including myself pledged our full co-operation, and this has been acknowledged in the Report. Church leaders have made it clear that they are committed to working with government, and this will of course include discussion by Victorian church leaders about the recommendations with the Victorian government.

“On a first reading of a very detailed report, there are many recommendations I would strongly support. For example, the recommendations to ensure crimes are reported to the police and to establish a statutory body to monitor and audit compliance on child protection requirements; something like what we have in New South Wales already. These recommendations should apply to all professions and all non-government and government organisations.

“I also support the recommendations for the creation of a government-established independent, alternative avenue for justice for victims of child abuse. I strongly support the idea of some sort of national or state-based compensation scheme established and run by government for all institutions to respond to victims of abuse.

“It was interesting to read the recommendations on civil litigation and incorporation. These are complex matters to which we have already given some thought. We look forward to seeing how they are developed, to discussing them with governments in due course.



“The report makes some criticisms of Catholic processes. It also acknowledges they are a genuine attempt to help. I believe that they helped many survivors and also helped to prevent abuse. While I acknowledge the Report’s comments about the inadequate past handling of criminal child abuse by the Catholic Church prior to the 1990s, the Melbourne Response and Towards Healing have never minimised or trivialised the problem. The church is committed to making improvements wherever possible and to following the law at all times.

“As I said to the Committee in evidence, ‘I am totally committed to improving the situation; I know the Holy Father is too. I know there are significant persons in the community and in the Church who believe, rightly, that we have failed . . . we have done quite a deal. I commit myself to doing whatever further is required and appropriate so that we can bring a bit more peace’. I repeat these words today and continue to stand by them.”

ENDS

+ George Card. Pell

Archbishop of Sydney
13 November 2013