



**PUBLIC HEARING INTO THE RESPONSE OF CATHOLIC CHURCH
AUTHORITIES TO ALLEGATIONS OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE BY JOHN
JOSEPH FARRELL**

CASE STUDY 44

The Hon Justice Peter McClellan AM
Chair, Royal Commission into
Institutional Responses to Child Sexual
Abuse

OPENING REMARKS

It is now almost three years since the Commission held its first public hearing. In that time we have been able to complete the hearings and provide reports to the Governor-General and Governors in 26 case studies. Twenty two of those reports have been publicly released and four await publication by government. A further 13 case studies have been conducted and are at various stages of completion. Reports in those case studies will be provided to government in due course.

I have previously indicated that it is not possible for the Royal Commission to conduct a public hearing in relation to every institution about which we have received allegations of the sexual abuse of children. The Commission has received information about over 4,000 institutions. Because of the impossibility of conducting a public hearing in relation to each of these institutions we have carefully selected the institutions we have publicly investigated with a view to providing the government, the institutions and the public with an understanding of the nature of the problems which we have identified. The case studies have been selected to ensure an appropriate geographical spread and also an appropriate reflection of the type of institution where survivors were abused.

A breakdown of the institutions examined in our public hearings reveals the following. 29 case studies have examined at least one state institution (70% of all case studies). In 11 case studies state institutions were examined as a primary institution. Faith based institutions have been examined in 26 of our case studies (63% of all case studies). Catholic institutions have been examined in 14 case studies (34% of all case studies) and Anglican institutions have been examined in 5 case studies (12% of all case studies).

Today we commence a further hearing in relation to issues in the Catholic Church in NSW. This will be our last hearing dealing with Catholic institutions apart from the final review hearing which will occur next year.

As you will be aware the Commission is closing registrations for private sessions on 30 September this year. The Commissioners have now met with survivors in 5,866 private sessions and a further 1,616 people have been

approved for a private session. We expect that by the time the Commission completes its work at the end of next year we will have held more than 7,200 private sessions.

The current breakdown of institutions in which survivors in private sessions state that they have been abused is as follows. 62% of attendees reported abuse in a faith-based institution. Around 27% reported abuse at government-run institutions. Abuse in Catholic institutions was reported by 40% of all private session attendees, abuse in Anglican institutions by 8% of attendees and abuse in Salvation Army institutions by 4% of attendees.

Apart from our work in public hearings and private sessions we have commissioned research across a broad range of issues relevant to the sexual abuse of children in an institutional context. The primary focus of our research has been to identify and document the changes that should be made to the way institutions are structured and governed to ensure so far as possible that children are not abused in the future. As required by our terms of reference we have also been concerned to ensure that the need for a redress response has been considered together with the response of the civil and criminal justice systems to allegations of the abuse of children. We have already published 27 research reports and a further 34 will be published in the near future. Apart from providing a valuable resource for the Commission these reports will be an authoritative source for other research and policy work long after the Commission has completed its final report.

I have previously mentioned that the Commission has worked co-operatively with police. Section 6P of the *Royal Commissions Act 1902* authorises a Royal

Commission to provide information to the police with respect to possible criminal offences. The Royal Commission has now referred 1,659 matters to police to consider for further investigation with a view to prosecution. Because of the volume of references the resources of the various police forces have been placed under significant pressure. Although I understand a great many references are awaiting investigation. So far prosecutions have been brought against 71 people.

After the present case study has been completed the Commission will turn its attention in a public hearing to harmful sexual behaviours of children within schools. There may be a limited number of future case studies. These will be followed by a series of review hearings in relation to various institutions and selected topics. I anticipate that our final hearing which has been given the working title 'Nature, Cause and Impact of Child Sexual Abuse' will focus amongst other matters on the 'why' question, and will take place in March 2017.