

MEDIA RELEASE

Catholic Church releases child sexual abuse reform proposals



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The leadership of the Catholic Church in Australia has endorsed the development of a reform agenda which could see the most significant overhaul of the Church's approach to clerical sexual abuse in its more than 200-year history in Australia.

Francis Sullivan, CEO of the Truth Justice and Healing Council, said the reforms are now being fully developed and will be presented to Church leaders in the first half of 2014.

"These proposals recognise that we must do better when we are dealing with victims of sexual abuse and as we work to make sure our institutions are as safe as possibly for children," Mr Sullivan said.

The Catholic Church reform agenda proposals include:

- appointing independent compensation commissioners to determine payments to victims who go through the victim response process known as *Towards Healing*. This would separate the pastoral responses in *Towards Healing* from the determination of financial payments
- the appointment of lay and independent experts to strengthen the Church's National Committee of Professional Standards
- the introduction of an independent national board to develop and administer national child protection standards. The board would monitor adherence to these standards and publicly report on compliance
- the board would also provide more rigorous assessment, monitoring, auditing and enforcement of *Towards Healing* practices
- the introduction of greater transparency through public reporting by both the new national board and the *Towards Healing* process.

The reform proposals are outlined in the Truth Justice and Healing Council's *Towards Healing* submission to the Royal Commission into institutional responses to child sexual abuse.

Mr Sullivan said that ultimately it may be appropriate for the Church to merge the reparation element of *Towards Healing* into a national compensation scheme to which all relevant institutions would contribute to, should this be a recommendation of the Royal Commission.

"While the Church supports calls for a national scheme, it would have to be a recommendation from the Royal Commission which is accepted by Governments, it could take many years to establish and may face significant constitutional hurdles.

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“This is why the Church is going ahead with developing its own reform proposals which could be put in place as soon as late next year and could work alongside any future national scheme. They could be revised in the light of recommendations from the Victorian Parliamentary and Cuneen inquiries and the Royal Commission itself,” Mr Sullivan said.

The Truth Justice and Healing Council was established by the Catholic Church in Australia to coordinate the Church’s response to the Royal Commission.

Its role is to oversee the Church's engagement with the Commission, to develop new policies to protect children and young people and to help the Church respond to any future complaints appropriately and with justice, putting the needs of victims first.

Media contact: Michael Salmon 0417 495 018

The Truth Justice and Healing Council Towards Healing submission can be seen at:

http://www.tjhcouncil.org.au/media/39435/30549468_2_TJHC-Towards-Healing-submission-30-Sep-2013.pdf

For more information on the Truth Justice and Healing Council go to: www.tjhcouncil.org.au

For more information on the Royal Commission go to:

<http://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/Pages/default.aspx>