



CLOSING REMARKS

Case Study 57

The Hon Justice Peter McClellan AM

Chair, Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse

Today brings the last of our case study hearings to an end. There is an unfinished matter which has been delayed because a trial is listed in April. We will consider the future course of that matter at a directions hearing at a later date.

As I indicated on Monday we have been conducting public hearings since September 2013. The hearings have heard from many survivors and have allowed the intensive scrutiny of the actions of individuals within institutions. We have also looked at how institutions were managed at the time of the abuse and how, once the abuse became known, the institution responded. We have been told by many people that the public hearings have had a profound effect on the community's understanding of the nature and impact of the sexual abuse of children in Australia. This is primarily due to the courage and determination of the survivors who have given evidence. Although a relatively small number they have given voice to the suffering of the tens of thousands who have been abused in an institutional context in Australia.

There are many people who must be acknowledged for their contribution to our program of public hearings. The starting point for a public hearing is the

work undertaken by the Commission's legal and investigation teams. They have worked with great dedication, and often under great stress and for long days to bring together witnesses and documents for the hearing. We thank each of them for their efforts on the many case studies. We have also valued the contribution from our policy staff who, of course, have a fundamental role in the preparation of our final report.

The technical expertise required to ensure our hearings are available to the internet has been complex. Without question this process has contributed greatly to the community's knowledge of the work we have been doing. Going forward I suggest the usual position should be for the live streaming of the hearings of any public inquiry. Our thanks go to the team of technicians and operators who have made this possible.

The Royal Commission has travelled across the entire country to conduct public hearings. This has been a challenging and, at times, complex logistical task. The Commissioners are grateful to the staff who have contributed to the smooth running of our public hearing program.

We owe a special debt to the dedicated team of stenographers who have produced our transcripts. A real time transcript is a valuable tool for a Royal Commission but we appreciate it imposes considerable burdens on those who prepare it. We greatly appreciate their efforts. They have our thanks.

The Commissioners thanks are also due to the many people in institutions who have assisted by producing documents, identifying witnesses, and in almost all cases, participating in our public hearings with the purpose of assisting the Commissioners to understand the story from their institution.

For the care and support that our counselling team and community engagement staff have given to witnesses appearing before the Commission, especially survivors, the Commissioners express our gratitude. Their task has been complex but of fundamental importance to ensure that a survivor's engagement is both positive, but more importantly, safe. These teams have the admiration of all the Commissioners for the skill and care they give to their task.

We also express today our gratitude to the media for the comprehensive and effective reporting of our work. Television has provided live coverage of the opening of many hearings. I appreciate the limits of column space and the demands of deadlines. But within these limits many media outlets have given prime news or current affairs space to our work. Both the Commissioners and, I am sure, the entire community are grateful for their efforts.

Our thanks also go to all counsel, both those who have assisted the Commission and those who have appeared for survivors and institutions. But above all our thanks are due to Gail Furness. She came to us with the insight gained from an inquiry in the child protection area. She has long ago mastered the inquiry process and the management of a public hearing. But beyond those matters Gail has remarkable abilities of forensic analysis and advocacy. Few people would appreciate the enormous burdens she has carried throughout the hearings. Scrupulously fair, without Gail's efforts we simply could not have completed our task.

Finally we extend both our recognition and thanks to survivors who gave evidence. Without them our public hearings would be a hollow attempt to tell their story. Without them the realities of child sexual abuse and the extent of institutional failure could not be recognised. Given with difficulty but great

courage the telling of each of your personal stories has enabled the Commission and the general community to gain a real understanding of your suffering. It will assist the Royal Commission in the preparation of recommendations in our final report to which we now must turn.