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## Complaint against Reverend Garth Hawkins

**People Interviewed:**

Garth Hawkins  
 Steven Fisher

**Other material***Documents:*

Notes of Meeting between

The Bishop, the Reverend Hawkins and the Registrar held 25<sup>th</sup> May, 2001The Bishop, the Reverend Canon Cave, Steve and the Registrar held 16<sup>th</sup> May, 2001Letter from M. Stoddart (Principal Crown Counsel) dated 30<sup>th</sup> July, 2001Letter from the Reverend Canon Cave to the Bishop dated 10<sup>th</sup> May, 2001

Sundry letters from the Anglican Church of Australia, Diocese of Tasmania

Copy of Statutory Declaration by Steven Fisher (unsigned) dated 31<sup>st</sup> September, 1999Copy of Statutory Declaration by Steven Fisher (signed?) dated 11<sup>th</sup> (?) January, 2000Letter from Dr. Sale dated 19<sup>th</sup> April, 2001

Copy of Anglican Church of Australia -Diocese of Tasmania

Ministry and Tribunal Ordinance, 1998 (amended 1999, 2000, 2001)

*Video Tape:*

Of the Speech by the Reverend Hawkins at the Wedding of Steven Fisher.

**Interviews:**

Garth Hawkins 20.9.2001 (2 hours), 15.10.2001 (1 hour)

Steve Fisher 20.9.2001 (1 hour)

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**Background**

Steven Fisher has alleged that the Reverend Garth Hawkins had sexually abused him over many years. This allegation has been refuted by the Reverend Hawkins.

The purpose of this report is to advise the Bishop if there is a case to answer regarding the possibility of sexual misconduct of the Reverend Garth Hawkins. It is not within the scope of this assessment to determine if the Reverend Garth Hawkins is guilty of sexual misconduct, much less that he did or did not commit the offences of which he is accused by Mr Fisher. Rather, the purpose is to act as a Board of Inquiry in accordance with Schedule 2A (Complaints Involving Sexual Misconduct) of the Ministry and Tribunal Ordinance and inform itself in order to determine whether there is a case for him to answer.

This assessment was based on interviews with the Reverend Hawkins, one interview with Steven Fisher and the perusal of the written material provided by William Haas, Registrar, the viewing of the video tape of the Reverend's speech at Mr. Fisher's wedding and the full letter of Dr Ian Sale. All interviews were conducted by the Reverend Greg Clifton and myself. This report has been jointly prepared and hopes to address these issues from the perspective of both a parish clergyman and psychologist.

**Documents**

The Reverend Hawkins provided letters and reports not forwarded by the Registrar. One, by Dr Wilkinson, dated 19 July, 2001, to his general practitioner, Dr Climie, indicated that the Reverend Hawkins suffered from a degree of cerebral atrophy caused by alcohol and dilantin, a medication used in the treatment of epilepsy. Another report, dated 3rd of February 1992, noted that the Reverend Hawkins had been admitted for detoxification and had a 25 year history of alcohol abuse. It further noted that the Reverend Hawkins had been taking antidepressants and had impaired cognitive functioning, specifically in the areas of global memory, judgment, reasoning information processing, impaired learning and error recognition, as well as labile affect. It concluded that the Reverend Hawkins may "find it difficult to cope with the exigencies of employment."

Dr Sale's letter, the assessment of Steven Fisher, noted that Steven Fisher does have anxiety disorder and accepts, on the basis of interviews with Mr Fisher alone, that in part this has been caused by "being subject to abusive conduct by an individual who was trusted, and in some ways was filling the role of a father."

### **Interviews with Reverend Garth Hawkins**

The Reverend Garth Hawkins made himself available for the interviews conducted on the 20th of September, 2001, but found the process so disturbing as to warrant his returning home before the final interview with him. This final interview was then conducted at his residence on the 15th of October, 2001.

The Reverend Hawkins, aged 56, currently lives with the lady with whom he has had a relationship for about 15 years and with whom he has been living for about nine years. He noted his hobbies as fishing, bush walking, Bluewater sailing, and other outdoor activities. Is currently involved in looking after his small garden and his cattle. The Reverend is one of two children and "was briefly married 30 years ago ... it lasted a year ... I married the girl next door."

The relationship with Steven Fisher, according to the Reverend Hawkins, resulted from the desire to help. Steven's mother had psychiatric problems and Steven himself suffered from epilepsy. Steven's father had left the family and the relationship between Steven and the Reverend Hawkins developed around sailing. The Reverend Hawkins provided Steven and his elder brother with the place to stay while their mother was in hospital. He also noted that as well as providing the place to stay for Steven and his brother, he also provided assistance to another boy, REDACTED

In about 1983, the Reverend Hawkins moved to Triabunna and soon after Steven also moved there and continued to live at the Rectory. The Reverend Hawkins noted that it was Steven who asked to live there. He lived there for many months after which time he returned to live in Devonport.

According to Garth Hawkins, there was no contact between Steven Fisher and himself until Steven asked the Reverend to baptise him. He also stated there was a further period of no contact for several years until Steven asked him to officiate at his marriage. It was at this time that the Reverend Hawkins made the speech recorded on the video.

During this extended period, and the Reverend Hawkins explained that his recollection of dates was not precise, the Reverend Hawkins had an alcohol problem and finally what he called a "breakdown".

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The Reverend Hawkins characterized his relationship with Steven Fisher as based on friendship and support. He noted that there was a degree of "male bonding" with "the camaraderie that binds with being the crew of a boat". He acknowledged that there was a degree of "shyacking" although this was mainly verbal. When asked about the boundaries, the Reverend Hawkins stated that they were "self-obvious". He described "a slap on the bum ... A push in passing". He specifically denied any touching of genitals and that he was "not aware of making a habit of "sitting people on his lap". He also added that in "context" most things wouldn't be out of bounds.

The Reverend Hawkins acknowledged that he had been involved in youth activities including activities such as bush walking, climbing or boating. At times, his group intermingled with the group run by Lou Daniels. He stated that "there was a reputation going around that various clergy were 'swapping boys' " and therefore he was more vigilant in their company. He stated that inevitably the boys had to shower and that he was aware that Steven was especially shy and so he avoided putting him in position where he might be embarrassed.

The Reverend Hawkins noted honestly that there were things he did not recall. He was upset that these allegations had been made and although the Reverend Hawkins stated his willingness to give Steven Fisher an apology, he did not know for what purpose. Similarly, he offered to hand in his licence to the Bishop but was afraid that, if he did, he would be tacitly admitting to the allegations.

In order to understand the sexual and dynamic elements of the behaviour of Reverend Hawkins, he was asked about his sexual history. It is not intended to go into the details except to highlight relevant details, that he saw himself as having a low libido, and was not very sexually active.

It is interesting to note that in the second interview the Reverend Hawkins seemed more angry with Steven Fisher and attributed ulterior motives in making the allegations, "I think this whole thing is a manipulation -- getting money out of the church." He stated that Steven Fisher had been an outgoing and extroverted lad who could "read adults and was aware of sexuality before he was capable of sex." When asked elaborate this the Reverend Hawkins stated "how he exploited me and my friends ... At the time, I thought it was friendship. Since the investigation by the CIB, I think it was manipulation."

### **Interview with Steven Fisher**

Steven Fisher was interviewed in relation to these allegations and presented a story that was very different in details to the one presented by the Reverend Hawkins. In his version, the Reverend Hawkins made suggestive comments and used inappropriate language, e.g. "calling me a spunk rat ... You've got a nice little arse."

He also accused the Reverend of behaving inappropriately, for example by asking Steven to sleep with him. He also noted that the Reverend Hawkins often made the suggestions when he had been drinking. In Steven Fisher's version of events, it was Reverend Hawkins who initiated Steven's move to Triabunna and later requested him to be baptised.

### **Discussion**

As stated, this assessment is not able to determine the truth of the allegations made by Steven Fisher, either by commenting on Mr. Fisher or the Reverend Hawkins or by determining who is telling the truth and who is lying. The reports of the Reverend Hawkins and Steven Fisher are diametrically opposed about the details of the allegations. The difficulty is that there must be one person who is lying outrageously and who has seriously wronged the other person in the telling of the lie or in the commission of acts of gross impropriety.

We are aware of certain factual matters,

- Steven Fisher has an anxiety disorder that may result, in part at least, from the acts of the Reverend Hawkins.
- Reverend Hawkins, in his role as a parish clergyman holding the licence of the Bishop of Tasmania, had a complicated relationship with Steven Fisher.
- The Reverend Hawkins had a long-standing alcohol problem that has had an effect on his health and cognitive functioning.
- He currently also suffers from depression.
- He has had an unusual, in sexual terms, relationship with his current partner.

The Reverend Garth Hawkins was in a relationship of priest to parishioner with a difference of age, role and power. He saw himself in *Loco Parentis*, but more as an uncle figure than father figure. In this fashion, it appears that the Reverend was, to some extent, unclear about his relationship to Steven, whether it was as friend, *Loco Parentis*, uncle, or something else.

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The Reverend himself spoke about “male bonding” in relation to Steven Fisher. Yet there was a lack of clarity about what “male bonding” referred to and how it was manifested. In the first interview with Reverend Hawkins, he nominated mainly verbal ways of bonding, but in the second interview, he referred to physical examples. He referred to a “slap on bum” or to “pat (him) on bum” and that this occurred anytime, when Di, his partner was present, when Steven’s mother was present or when Steven was alone. He stated that, “I didn’t feel inhibited with him, or him with me.”

In this, there seemed to be a paucity of understanding about the appropriate boundaries. When asked about the possibility of genital touching, the Reverend stated that it was “not something I couldn’t or wouldn’t do, but not something I would be seeking out... not out of lust”. However, the Reverend made another comment about such behaviours in context, saying that in the right context, such behaviour would not be out of boundaries. The Reverend gave examples of touching and said that Steven had sat on his lap, but that other adults had been present.

Lou Daniels was part of the history detailed by Steven and Reverend Hawkins. The Reverend explained that while there were rumours about the behaviour of Lou Daniels, he felt that these rumours were also known to others in the Church hierarchy. For this reason, he did not involve himself greatly with Lou Daniels, but neither did he feel that he needed to take any action in order to mitigate what was happening. This reflects at least tacit complicity with Lou Daniels behaviour, and may well apply to many other Church officials who do not, or have not, interfered with children.

In all of this, there seems to be the possibility of violations of boundaries, based on the possibility that the Reverend Hawkins does not know, and may have not then, had an proper understanding of the limits of appropriate behaviour or the extent of personal and professional boundaries.

There are also psychological issues to consider. There is an acknowledged, and serious history of alcoholism and depression and epilepsy. In the 1992 letter from Freemantle Hospital, it is noted that the Reverend suffered, as a result of his alcoholism and epilepsy, ‘cognitive impairment, including “judgement” and “reasoning”.’ This raises the possibility that the Reverend Hawkins may have had a degree of impairment in understanding the

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complexities of social situations. Further, alcohol consumption is likely to result in disinhibition, which is the tendency to do things that one would not normally do.

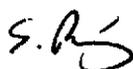
Alcohol abuse also leads to memory impairment and the Reverend Hawkins acknowledged that there was the possibility of some things that may have happened that he cannot remember. However, these behaviours are of such importance that, if they did occur, the Reverend has forgotten them. It is not unlikely, if they did occur, they occurred at moments of disinhibition, which nevertheless, is not an excuse.

An example of such disinhibition resulting in inappropriate behaviour might well be the speech at Steven Fisher's wedding, where the Reverend Hawkins made questionable statements, in terms of taste. These inappropriate comments were likely to have been made under the influence of alcohol.

The Reverend Hawkins described himself as having a very low libido and a relatively limited sexual life. This can be interpreted both to support the possibility of inappropriate sexual behaviour as well as to support the diametrically opposed position. It is noted here simply to highlight the Reverend's co-operation with this process of evaluation.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

In view of the foregoing, there is reason to believe that the Reverend Hawkins has been inappropriate. The likelihood of this is increased by two outstanding features in the Reverend Hawkins' presentation and history, the first being there is a lack of understanding of appropriate behaviour and limits, and the second being his history of alcohol abuse, which increased his disinhibition and therefore made it more likely that he would do things that he might otherwise have considered wrong. Without suggesting that there is any knowledge of the extent of any inappropriate behaviour, specifically whether it means that sexual abuse had occurred, these factors do suggest that the Reverend Hawkins has a case to answer.



The Reverend Greg Clifton & Stephen Pinkus

30.11.2001