

Aspinall  
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## ABC Online

### AM - Anglican Archbishop of Brisbane faces abuse claims

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Reporter: Kirrin McKechnie

DAVID HARDAKER: The Anglican Archbishop of Brisbane, Dr Phillip Aspinall, is this morning receiving some high profile support as he defends himself over an abuse allegation.

Known for his frank condemnation of sexual abuse within the Church, extraordinarily it was Dr Aspinall himself who's raised the allegations publicly.

Describing the claims as distressing, damaging and false, Dr Aspinall says he's been the subject of rumours over the past 18 months, and wants to set the record straight.

Kirrin McKechnie reports.

KIRRIN MCKECHNIE: Brisbane's Anglican Archbishop, Phillip Aspinall, is known as a church leader who's not afraid to talk about openly about issues surrounding allegations of child sexual abuse.

Appointed in February last year, he immediately acted on abuse allegations, deciding to set up a board of inquiry into the past actions of the Brisbane Diocese.

But this morning, Phillip Aspinall is himself the subject of allegations linked to abuse within the Church.

PHILLIP ASPINALL: A person contacted me just after I had become Brisbane's Anglican Archbishop alleging that he was sexually abused by a priest in Tasmania over 20 years ago.

He alleged that I had arranged for him to share the bed of the priest, who subsequently abused him.

I absolutely and totally rejected that allegation then, as I do now.

Independent witnesses also reject the allegation.

KIRRIN MCKECHNIE: Late yesterday, Phillip Aspinall held a media conference in Brisbane telling journalists at the risk of creating a story, he wanted to pre-empt allegations that he expected would be made in the media against him.

PHILLIP ASPINALL: I do not suggest that the publication of these false allegations about me is warranted, even if accompanied by my strong rejections.

On the contrary, my reason for speaking today is to openly and publicly disclose why they should not be publicised.

KIRRIN MCKECHNIE: The head of the Anglican Church, Dr Peter Carnley, was not available for an interview, but a spokesman for the Primate says the Church takes seriously all claims of abuse by clergy or church workers.

He says Dr Aspinall has demonstrated by his response that those with claims against the church are being heard. However, unsubstantiated or baseless claims do great harm.

Anti-child abuse campaigner, Hetty Johnston agrees.

HETTY JOHNSTON: Whoever's making these allegations needs to go to the police and lodge it formally, and lets get on with it and deal with it appropriately and properly.

I think whispering campaigns are counterproductive, and this has been quite a severe whispering campaign for some time

KIRRIN MCKECHNIE: Since Dr Aspinall's appointment as Archbishop, Hetty Johnston has welcomed his willingness to act quickly on abuse claims.

But she's puzzled by his statement.

HETTY JOHNSTON: It's just an absolutely bizarre situation, because nobody could have made any allegation public because that would have been defamation and the Archbishop has now held a media conference and tabled his defence if you like and, and now its in the public domain and now we are going to actually deal with it in the public domain.

DAVID HARDAKER: Anti-child abuse campaigner, Hetty Johnston, speaking to Kirrin McKechnie in Brisbane.

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