

# **DIOCESAN COUNCIL**

## **TABLED PAPERS**

**22 September 2016**

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Submission to the Diocesan Council Under the Responsible Persons Ordinance  
Diocesan Council, 22 September 2016

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**RECOMMENDATION**

The following options are available to Diocesan Council:

- A. The Diocesan Council having considered the submission of Mr Greg Hansen resolves to vary the decision made by the Commissary and resolves that Mr Greg Hansen not be removed from the office of parish council member. (This requires the support of two thirds of the members present and voting).
- B. This Diocesan Council having considered the submission of Mr Greg Hansen resolves to advise Mr Greg Hansen that it considered his submission but did not resolve to vary the decision of the Bishop.
- C. This Diocesan Council receives the submission of Mr Greg Hansen and resolves to give it further consideration after the public hearings in case study 42 have been completed.

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**SUBMISSION:**

-----Original Message-----

From: Greg Hansen [mailto:REDACTED]  
Sent: Thursday, 15 September 2016 12:58 PM  
To: John Cleary  
Subject: Responsible Persons Ordinance Appeal to the Diocesan Council.

Dear John,

As you may be aware the Assistant Bishop (purportedly as Commissary for the Bishop), has used the Responsible Persons Ordinance to remove me, and others, from various positions including the Cathedral Council. My right of appeal to the Diocesan Council requires you to put before the Council this letter by way of appeal against this action.

There are two issues which first need to be considered;

What is the legislative authority for the Assistant Bishop to act as Commissary whilst the Diocesan is still present in the Diocese? The Commissary delegation historically requires "the absence of the bishop".

How can the Diocesan Council not have an irremediable conflict of interest when a large majority of its members are employed directly, or indirectly, by the Bishop and the diocese?

As to the Commissary's letter:

After receiving the suspension, which I regarded as being based on spurious allegations, I wrote to the Assistant Bishop urging him to undo the damage he had done to the Cathedral congregation but I received no reply.

I was suspended by him, with many others who signed a letter of referral to the Royal Commission, from any governance positions with the church and he and the Dean caused others to be unable to do things like serving at the Eucharist, counting money, acting as tour guides in the Cathedral and even making coffee for the congregation after services. The Cathedral Council was disbanded and governance centralised in the Cathedral Board which he chairs.

He alleged that the letter to which I was a signatory was characterised as reflective of division in the Diocese, challenging of the credibility of the Bishop and reflective of coordinated opposition to the bishop.

His heavy handed use of the Responsible Persons Ordinance sadly shows an utter disconnect between the Episcopal leadership on the one hand, and the Cathedral and the rest of the diocese on the other. It is forgotten that this is a voluntary organisation. Forcing people out (and this already started to occur as a result to the Cathedral congregation) is hardly the way of the Gospel.

If the Assistant Bishop and the Diocesan are not aware of division within the Diocese on a range of issues then that is evidence itself of one of the problems that we face.

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Whilst the Royal Commission took the view that the bishop's credibility was perhaps at issue, I do not believe that credibility was really a concern for the authors of the letter to the Commission and this may well be raised with the Commission at its next sittings.

The Royal Commission had asked for cooperation from the public and the church and we were responding to that. One of the purposes of the letter was to raise the question of why Bishop Thompson, reflecting on his experiences as a 19 year old man, would consider himself to be entitled to the same consideration and concern as defenceless children who have been abused. Further, we worried about what he had done since to safeguard other perhaps younger, potential victims from the same predatory behaviour by his transgressors. Needless to say, it was not possible to ask him personally as he will not meet with people. (I have been trying to meet with him for nearly a year).

And since when has opposition to the bishop, coordinated or not, been inherently 'irresponsible'?

Bishop Peter said that he considered that I, and the rest of the signatories, had not acted honestly and fairly in the best interests of the Diocese or conducted ourselves in the manner outlined in the document "Being Together".

So many keen members of the church would not have written as they did if they did not believe that they had an obligation to the church to act honestly and fairly and were doing so. And the number of signatories could easily have been higher. I believe that we have a greater understanding of the true purpose of the code of conduct than the bishops seem to. In fact it is they who seem not to understand the true intent of that document or that it applies to them as well.

There has been much talk about the bishops not being welcome in the Cathedral but even if this is true, which I doubt, then that is a new phenomenon and perhaps they both should look at themselves to find the reason.

But the nub of the effect of Bp Peter's letter, and that of the Dean which I dare say takes a coordinated stance, is a complete misunderstanding of the damage that is being done to the cathedral and it's congregation. I am aware of the opinion, for example, that Andrew Trail as a committed and well serving Warden of the cathedral has formed and I agree entirely with him. He will not return to the role he played without a direct and personal apology. I have not heard of any of the signatories who would change their position or many in the congregation who would not agree with them.

If this folly is not undone then the most immense damage will be done, not only to the cathedral but to individual parishioners who have been loyal members of the congregation for many years, in some cases decades.

It is the complete disregard for individual lay members of the church in his quest, and also that of the bishop, for authoritarian control of the opinions which they should hold that shows precisely where diocesan priorities lie. The irony is that the problem of authoritarian control and of silencing critics is precisely the attitude that contributed to the culture that allowed historic child abuse to take place.

We should all grieve for the actions of the leaders of the church in the past and be rightly ashamed of what they did. To this end we should welcome the investigations of the Royal Commission and the worthwhile assistance being given to it, and to survivors of abuse, by Bishop Thompson.

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But that does not serve as an excuse to attempt to punish the laity who worry about other aspects of episcopal activity in this diocese.

Some compassionate shepherding of God's people would not go astray

I urge the Diocesan Council to reconsider and remedy this bizarre use of the Responsible Persons Ordinance, not only for me but for all of those who responded positively to the invitation from the Royal Commission. In fact if it meant that the damage to the cathedral could be remedied and its other council members restored, I would happily accept my own exclusion.

Greg Hansen.

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### **Response to the email from Mr Greg Hansen**

1. The Bishop is not limited to appointing Commissaries only in his absence.
2. The Bishop appointed another person to act to avoid any perception of conflict of interest.
3. The Diocesan Council has a conflict of interest policy of which all members are aware. Should any member form the view that they or other members of the Council are conflicted in this matter they should raise that conflict in the manner prescribed by the Policy.
4. The Diocese has put in place Ms Gill Fletcher and Mr Tim Dyer consultants to assist the Cathedral respond to the impact of disclosures of abuse and the proceedings of the Royal Commission have had on the Cathedral congregations. An initial gathering of the Cathedral congregation was held on Sunday 11 September. Participants at the meeting provided initial feedback which includes a clear expression of their desire to ensure care for victims and survivors abuse. They have also indicated a desire to repair their relationship with the Bishop.



## *The Anglican Diocese of Newcastle*

2 September 2016

Mr Greg Hansen

By email: REDACTED

Dear Mr Hansen,

I am deeply disappointed that I must write to you about recent matters at the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

On Tuesday, as part of its hearings into the Anglican Diocese of Newcastle, the Commissioners were shown a letter to the Royal Commission, to which you are a signatory (Royal Commission document reference CORR.0220.001.0001\_R). The letter has been characterised as challenging the credibility the Bishop of Newcastle, reflective of division in the Diocese and reflective of coordinated opposition to the Bishop of Newcastle.

As Bishop Thompson is the subject of the letter to the Royal Commission he has stepped aside from giving consideration to the effect of the letter within the Diocese. He has appointed me as his Commissary for that purpose and delegated to me the authority of the Bishop in this regard.

The Dean has written to the Bishop requesting the Bishop to address the leadership and governance of the Cathedral.

You will be aware as a member of the Parish Council of the Cathedral Parish that you have certain duties and obligations. These, normal duties for people in positions of governance responsibility, are outlined to in *the Responsible Persons Ordinance 2015*. They include,

- to act honestly and fairly in the best interests of the Anglican Diocese of Newcastle [ACNC Duties of a Responsible Person]; and
- to conduct yourself in keeping with the manner outlined in the Code of Conduct called *Being Together*.

I have formed the view that in signing that letter you were not fulfilling the duties of a responsible person as defined in the Diocese. I have also formed view that the failure to fulfil those duties in this instance is of the highest gravity and that I must take the action.

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As a consequence of the views I have formed, I am removing you from all positions of governance you hold within the Anglican Diocese of Newcastle. As a result of my decision you are suspended from now (2 September 2016) from any of your positions with a governance body in the Diocese.

As part of the diocesan commitment to ensuring fairness my decision is a reviewable decision. You may make a submission in writing (not exceeding a reasonable length) to the Diocesan Council that my decision be varied. Those submissions close at 5pm on Friday 16<sup>th</sup> September 2016 and need to be made to the Diocesan Business Manager. The Diocesan Council will consider any submissions at the next ordinary meeting scheduled for 22 September 2016. The decision of the Diocesan Council is a final decision.

In the event that you do not make a submission to the Diocesan Council your membership of each governance body will cease on 16<sup>th</sup> September 2016. In the event that you do make a submission to the Diocesan Council and it does not resolve to vary my decision then your membership of each governance body will cease from 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2016. Further you will not be eligible to be elected or appointed to any governance body in the Diocese for a period of two years from that date.

My pastoral counsel to you is to carefully reflect on your decision to sign the letter, to accept my decision and to consider making a formal written apology to the Bishop of Newcastle and to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. You can from here make choices to actively participate in facing the past and shaping a healthy future.

I recognise that as you reflect you may feel some sense of personal crisis. I remind you that Lifeline offers crisis support counselling services. They can be contacted by ringing 13 11 14.

As Christians we are bid to pray. As I have prepared this letter I have prayed for you, for Bishop Greg, for the Diocese and for those who have been deeply harmed by the actions of people within the Diocese. Please be assured of my continued prayers for deep and profound healing that Christ whom we serve may be truly honoured by all that we do.

Yours sincerely in Christ



**Dr Peter Stuart**  
**Assistant Bishop of Newcastle**  
**Commissary to the Bishop of Newcastle**

**Copies attached**

- The Diocese of Newcastle (Responsible Person) Ordinance 2015
- Being Together Expectations of Behaviour in our Church Community
- ACNC Duties of Responsible Persons