

## To the Board of Enquiry

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PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

Re your enquiry regarding BYB and John Elliott

I have attached a statement in response to your letter of 31<sup>st</sup> January regarding the sequence of events as I recall them.

Yours sincerely

The Right Reverend John Noble  
Bishop of North Queensland

**BYB and John Elliott.**

Not long after I became a Bishop, in July or August 1993 I was approached by **RED** and **REDACT** who were friends and former parishioners from when I was Rector of the Parish of Sunnybank, where they were very active in church life.

They informed me that their sons, especially **BYB** had been abused by a family friend - a layman at the time - now a deposed priest named John Elliott. Elliott is now in prison for sexual abuse offences against boys.

I knew the Elliotts too, his wife **REDA** better than John, but we had been friends. John had been a Diocesan leader in the CEBS and also in various parishes including Sunnybank. By the time I took up ministry in Sunnybank, John was in process of being ordained and was moving to take up ministry in Bundaberg. He was therefore not active in the Parish. Mrs Elliott though, remained in Sunnybank for a good part of my first year there, and we worked together in ministry.

The offences had occurred apparently when Elliott was Assistant Bursar at Churchie and the boys were students there. Some incidents happened at the school, they said, and others in the parish. I was shocked and very distressed. I had other reasons to be dismayed and angry also.

Just before I left Sunnybank at the start of 1989 to take up ministry at St Francis' College, I was contacted about another paedophile (x) at Sunnybank. A woman complained that some years earlier, her son had been sexually abused by (x) at CEBS Sunnybank. They did not want to press charges, but wanted to warn me of his activities. I confronted the man but he denied all allegations.

I sacked him from all involvement in the parish and to my knowledge he has never been back, though he continues to live at Sunnybank. I also warned Fr Michael Ingall my successor in office as Rector of Sunnybank. As it has turned out since, this man has abused others, and I believe the police were informed early last year. Unfortunately some of the victims of his abuse who were most damaged will not come forward.

The relevance of all this is that I feared for my own son who had been in CEBS, and had gone on camps etc with this man. I had even allowed the man to take my son alone for a weekend excursion. I was devastated, as the man had received community recognition for his services to children and youth etc. No one suspected anything. No one had spoken out, at that stage. So for several years I had watched and worried about my son and what this man may have done to him.

I had endeavoured to find out from others if they knew of (x)s activities, and had asked other adult CEBS leaders. One of those I asked was Elliott. This was before his own activities were exposed. He denied that anything wrong had happened in the Sunnybank CEBS. At the same time he knew full well he had used the CEBS as a means of gaining access to boys.

I would describe my anger towards (x) at times as volcanic. The revelation by the REDA about Elliott angered me towards him, too, because trustingly at the time I had accepted his denials, and my reaction against Elliott was magnified because of my fears about my own son. I might add that I have talked openly with my son about all this now. RED was not abused but dangerously close to being so. Other boys were not so fortunate.

As the REDA say in their letter, I met with them and I was alarmed. I tried to conceal my fear and anger as well. I had no reason to believe Elliott may have abused my son, but I feared there had been a paedophile ring at work in my parish and children had been harmed including my own, and I had naively trusted someone who had betrayed me and the whole church.

I informed Archbishop Hollingworth as the letter says. I told the Archbishop about my fears for my son, RED. I specifically indicated to the Archbishop that I wished/needed to distance myself from the REDA complaint as the Church's representative in handling the matter -

[a] because of my friendship with them and to some extent certainly with Mrs Elliott and her family (I had taken the daughter's wedding, for example)

[b] because of my anxiety and anger I did not trust my judgment in handling it.

The Archbishop then handled it himself, in consultation with the Bishop of the Region where Elliott was serving at the time.

To add to the difficulty, Mrs REDAC Elliott asked me for help because when her husband confessed his wrongdoing to her, she was distraught. She had no knowledge previously of his activities. While I had sympathy towards REDACTED, I told her that because of my anger about the possibility of my own son's being abused, I was not able to counsel her. I was too caught up in it. They were still at this time in the parish of Dalby. To make matters worse, I had also been Rector of Dalby, and I had real fears about what Elliott may have been doing to children there, and I suppose some sense of care for my former parishioners.

The sequence of events following the RED's contact with me is accurately described in the RED's letter in the bottom five paragraphs of the first page.

By and large the matter was handled by the Archbishop himself in consultation with the Bishop of the Western Region, Bishop Clyde Wood. If the matters were reported upon in a Bishops meeting I would usually remain quiet or reiterate to the Archbishop, words to the effect, "You know how I feel about this RED".

The Archbishop sent Elliott to a psychiatrist in the latter part of 1993. I believe the psychiatrist advised the Archbishop that Elliott was a paedophile and that paedophiles do not change their behaviour. I believe he warned the Archbishop against leaving Elliott in office.

The Archbishop wrote to Elliott telling him of his decision, to leave him as Rector of Dalby. I had great misgivings about this at the time but distanced myself from it, for the reasons given above. As I remember it, there were to be certain conditions including professional help, supervision (I cannot say by whom or in what form) and forbidding involvement with children especially boys.

He was also to be required to retire at age 65, though canonically he could otherwise go on to age 70.

I recall the Archbishop saying that he had warned Elliott in the letter he wrote to him telling him of his decision, that he was taking a risk in acting against psychiatric advice, but that he considered however the needs of the parish and the effect of disclosure and removal of Elliott on them, and the financial circumstances of the Elliotts themselves to be such that he would set that advice aside, trusting in the various sanctions he had put in place. Elliott had claimed that his paedophile activities had ceased with his ordination, and the Archbishop seemed to set considerable store by this, and I think he hoped that Elliott would respond to the Archbishop's expression of a degree of trust, and would comply.

When the full Thursday bishops meeting was told of this it was my impression that it was already arranged.

Regarding Elliott's lack of comprehension of the seriousness of the offences, I can well believe that he said what he is reported in the RED's letter. I did have a brief conversation with Elliott where he apologised for the trouble he had caused, but said, as if to mitigate it that he thought they (the boys) enjoyed it as he did, and that he thought they were willing partners. In other words a typical paedophile response.

Much later, when the charges were brought against Elliott in the Bundaberg cases, he gave me the tape of his interview with two detectives. I listened to a portion of it, and again I heard him respond in a similar way to their questions about his understanding of the impact of what he was doing on his victims. He seems to lack real comprehension of how his victims have been affected.

I was the Bishop of the Northern Region. The RED had by the mid 1990's moved to Maleny in retirement. As the bishop of the area I met them in church from time to time and we talked as friends. Given my own personal concerns, I felt a deal of sympathy with them, almost as a parent of a victim also. They continued to be deeply worried about BYB and we talked about that. They could not understand the Archbishop letting Elliott stay in office. They told me the boys - RED and BYB

had particular difficulty. I explained the constraints the Archbishop had placed on Elliott and the termination date, in the hope that they would see that the Archbishop had not totally exonerated Elliott. They were not impressed.

Around the last quarter of 1995 (It could well be as the REDs say in their letter, page two paragraph three) REDACTE (I think) faxed the Archbishop at his office in Ann St. I find it hard to remember the context or those present, but I remember that the drift of the letter was that he did this to make quite open what Elliott had done and he wanted people to know how angry he was, and he was prepared to expose all this to public gaze. I think the fax may have mentioned exposure in the Media. The letter questioned the Archbishop about how he could leave a paedophile in office. I have no reason to doubt the content of paragraph three of the RED's letter.

I remember that the Archbishop seemed very angry about RED's action. The Archbishop may also have spoken to RED on the phone as is mentioned. I believe a couple of days after the fax the Archbishop wrote to RED. The letter would be in RED's possession. The letter answered RED's complaints and offers a defence of the Archbishop's action. My concern at the time was the defensive reaction of the Archbishop, and I feared that the letter would come across in an angry and defensive way. I think the Archbishop was attempting to make RED see that going public might cause BYB and his family further harm, and also that the measures he the Archbishop had taken had been adequate, I feared the letter could expose him to accusations of insensitivity to the victims and greater concern for the Elliots.

I think I saw the letter only after it had been sent, so in a sense it was too late, but I recall being concerned it might backfire on the Archbishop at some point in the future. I can't affirm that I said, as the RED's letter sets out, that I urged the Archbishop not to send it, because I think it had already gone. I may have expressed concern in a meeting that it was unwise to write in the way he had reported. Given my general distancing from the matter as set out above, I was still very wary about offering advice to the Archbishop as to what to do. I certainly was very concerned about it though.

I saw the RED as reported and I learned of their reaction to the Archbishop's letter. I sought to minimize what I perceived to be the damage it was causing, and so apologised. I am not sure that I said it was insulting, but I may have done so.

Elliott stayed at Dalby until early 1998 when he retired. The Archbishop then gave him a general licence, a common practice with respect to retired priests. I think there was some sympathy for the Elliots in the sense that they had little to retire on, and lived in impoverished circumstances, and if he could get a little money for occasional services, it would help them both. In other words there was an extension of the compassion shown to them in allowing them to remain in Dalby for the over four years from 1993.

Elliott repeatedly claims he has not committed any paedophile acts since

being ordained. I think he was given a licence on the basis that this was true. I do not know if further warnings were given to him about restricted engagement in ministry. Elliott had ceased to have any involvement with children as far as I know, and confined his work to helping during church services and in adult church organizations at Redcliffe.

In 1998, in the second half of the year, the Bishops went to the Lambeth Conference. I was the first of the Bishops to return from overseas. I discovered that in our absence one of the [REDA] boys - I think [REDA] - had phoned the parish of Dalby more than once. These calls had been received by the Secretary and by the new Rector. Actually one of Elliott's other victims had also been calling, which confuses the issue too. This man was one of the successful complainants in the Bundaberg case.

I discovered that the phone calls had been mentioned to the Diocesan Insurance Officer and noted by him. I called the Rector of Dalby and explained the situation - that the allegations the caller [REDA] was making were true since Elliott had confessed to them, and to be vigilant about any complaints about Elliott which may come to his attention, as there could be victims in the parish who would need to be taken seriously and cared for. Nothing was said to the parishioners who were not aware of these calls.

I should add that Bishop Wood left the Western Region in 1996 to go to North Queensland as Bishop. He was replaced by Bishop Raymond Smith. Bishop Smith did not know about Elliott, but he learned about it after he came back from Lambeth and was made aware of the calls.

In mid-2001, Elliott contacted me. He told me he had been interviewed by the police on matters of the abuse of 5 boys dating back to the 1970s when he was a lay CEBS leader in Bundaberg. I advised Elliott the Church would not assist him in his defence, and he should seek legal aid. After informing the Bishop Administrator, I visited Elliott immediately to take back his Permission to Officiate Licence. This disclosure by Elliott was the first sure knowledge we had of any other offences by him outside the [BYB] matters mentioned above, though I had always suspected there would be more.

As I anticipated having listened to the tapes of interview, Elliott pleaded guilty to a considerable list of offences, and is now serving his sentence.

In late January 2002 I was approached by a clergy friend of the [REDA] who reported that [RE] had gone to be with his son who was in a bad way. The friend told me that it was all about to be made public and asked me to speak to [BYB] about "not going public" on Elliott. I said I could not, as it would be an attempt at a cover up. I asked him if he was aware that Elliott had already been charged with other matters, and that his licence had already been removed. I mentioned that Elliott would likely get a jail term. He said they did not know, but he would tell the [REDA] that, in the hope that they would see that Elliott was being brought to justice and would be punished.

On February 5th 2002, I was called by a solicitor from Shine Roche McGowan. He wanted to see me urgently about matters concerning Elliott and BYB [REDACTED]

Mr Robert Cunningham of Flower and Hart, and I met Mr Brown the next day, 6th February.

We learned that the Diocese was to be given 7 days to respond to the allegations made against the Church by BYB [REDACTED]. Civil action was mentioned, as was monetary compensation. Of course we had had the exposure of some of these things in the Media.

I suspected that in the Channel 9 Sunday Program, the "man in the shadows" could be BYB [REDACTED] and the allegations seem to fit the circumstances. I don't know if that was so and can't verify if as he claimed, the Archbishop tried to steer the man away from going to the police.

This matter has deeply troubled me over the years. I have been bound up in it personally of course. At times it has been a matter of some regret to me that I did not speak up more at moments when better judgment may have led to different outcomes, but found myself in a difficult and very ambivalent situation, as I have indicated.

Bishop John Noble  
5<sup>th</sup> February, 2003