

# The Catholic Parish of Boolaroo/Warners Bay



12-04-05

Dear Bishop Michael,

I am referring to your comment quoted in "The Herald" today and verified by your media release that "When Fr James Fletcher is released from prison, it is the responsibility of the Bishop of Maitland - Newcastle to ensure close supervision and monitoring of his behaviour."

I am sure that this letter comes as no surprise due to my position expressed on other occasions.

I cannot agree with you on this approach. It accepts responsibility and I dare say establishes culpability for inappropriate behaviour of a released sexual offender after release from prison. Furthermore, it seems that the responsibility is not of the type that a Bishop properly can assume. Surely if anyone has the role, it is the role of the police force and perhaps other statutory bodies "to ensure close and careful monitoring of his behavior".

For instance, is the Bishop of Maitland-Newcastle prepared to ensure that every time a released sexual offender attends a shopping centre, goes to Church, goes for a walk, goes to bed, goes to the football, that the sexual offender will have close supervision and careful monitoring of his behaviour! And then, of course, what is the nature of this close supervision and careful monitoring? How do you intend to do this? Are we going to employ private detectives to monitor the priests who are released from prison? Are we going to have monitoring devices placed on the individual, are we going to have a fellow priest or lay person assigned to the person 24 hours a day and so on?

This policy also places your successor and perhaps your other fellow Bishops in a most difficult position when perhaps they are unprepared to accept the responsibility that you have accepted on behalf of the Diocese of Maitland - Newcastle.

Given the ramifications of such a policy, it is difficult to accept that you have not consulted with the priests and members of the Diocese in general regarding the establishment of this policy. Has a legal firm advised you that this policy is appropriate? Has this policy been endorsed by the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference, has this policy been accepted by any other Diocese or body within the Church as an acceptable approach. If so, where and how.

I ask that you reconsider your position. I will forward a copy of this letter to the Council of Priests for their comment.

Yours sincerely,

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