

NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

A Committee of the Australian Catholic Bishops & the
Australian Leaders of Religious Institutes

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

HELD AT 49 GORDON ST PADDINGTON NSW

4TH MARCH 1997.

1. PRESENT: Bishops Kevin Manning (Chair), Geoff Robinson, Peter Connors; Srs Evelyn Woodward RSJ, Angela Ryan CSB; Brother Michael Hill FMS; Ms Myolene Carrick; Mr Paul Serong, Mr Laurie Rolls; Fr's Brian Lucas, John Usher, Kevin Dance CP, David Cappel (Executive Officer).

2. APOLOGIES: Nil

3. The Chairman, Bishop Manning opened the meeting at 10.00am with prayer.

4. The agenda was confirmed.

5. The minutes of the previous meeting of the 26 November 1996 were confirmed with the following amendments.

Point 7.2 "with the offender" to read "in relation to the offender".

Point 7.5: Spelling of Dr Blaszcynski's name to be corrected.

Point 8 to read 'a commitment to JOINTLY fund the Professional Standards Budget'.

6. TOWARDS HEALING

6.1 15,000 copies of Towards Healing have been printed and distributed to all dioceses and religious institutes. 5,000 more copies of *Towards Healing* are to be printed. The cost of printing are to be met by CCI following Mr Paul Serong's, (General Manager of CCI) generous offer.

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6.2 The National Committee decided that an updated version (second edition of *Towards Healing* would not be printed until one to two years of experience with the current document.

6.3 The executive officer reported on the ongoing establishment of Professional Standards Resource Groups. The National Committee asked the executive officer to ensure that a minimal level of in service training for PSRG'S occurred before 31 March 1997.

6.3.1 The National Committee discussed the benefit of lay persons being the Chair of Resource Groups; the difficulty in finding suitable persons to take on the role of Convenor (if some States this may have to be a full time job); the need for personnel on resource groups to be in place as soon as possible in order for public credibility to be maintained on this matter.

6.3.2 The National Committee reinforced the point that the Convenor is the critical person on the resource group.

6.3.4 The executive officer is to write to bishops and religious leaders about these matters.

6.4 Discussions with Police Services is ongoing in SA and NSW. The Police Services in SA have agreed not to charge a fee for police screenings requested through the SA Professional Standards Resource Group. The issue of victims who do not want to contact the Police is under discussion in both SA and NSW with the Police Services.

The National Committee asked the executive officer to write to the Archbishops informing them of the value of the discussions in SA and NSW and to urge them to initiate or continue discussions in their own States or Territories.

6.5 Father Usher made the point that at a recent meeting of the NSW Professional Standards Resource Group confusion was expressed regarding the roles of contact persons and assessors. Father Usher was asked to present this issue for discussion at the next National Committee meeting.

6.6 The executive officer reported on discussions held with Archbishop D'Arcy regarding the establishment of a Tasmanian Professional Standards Resource Group. Discussions have been held between the Archbishop and the relevant religious leaders and the Tasmanian PRSG has been appointed.

6.7 The executive officer reported on discussions with Archbishop Bathersby and Bishop Gerry regarding the appointment of a Queensland PRSG. Appointments are yet to be made.

6.8 The executive officer reported on discussions with Bishop Healy regarding the re appointment of the WA PSRG.

6.9 The executive officer reported on a full day meeting with the NSW PSRG regarding the implementation of *Towards Healing*.

6.10 A checklist of duties of the PSRG and the Convenor was tabled by the executive officer. This checklist is to be distributed to all PSRG's to assist them in clarifying their roles and functions.

6.11 Father Cappelletto reported on a meeting held with the religious leaders of Victoria regarding the establishment of the Victorian Professional Standards Resource Group. Father Cappelletto informed the meeting that at the end of the gathering Fr. Day SJ Provincial of the Jesuits in Australia informed him that the Jesuits would not be party to the national principles and procedures. Father Day informed Father Cappelletto that legal advice to the Jesuits was such that they felt unable to co operate in this matter. Father Cappelletto indicated that he was happy to talk to the Jesuits legal advisors about this matter; that discussions with the Jesuits should occur regarding what Contact Persons should say when they receive a complaint about a Jesuit.

Father Cappelletto mentioned to Father Day that there was full agreement by religious leaders at the previous annual meeting of the ACLRI at which his predecessor, Father Bill Uren SJ was in attendance.

Following discussion by the National Committee Father Kevin Dance CP, President of the ACLRI said that he would arrange discussions with the Jesuits about this issue.

7. CASE STUDIES

The executive officer reported that very few CASE STUDIES have been received since the last meeting. Approximately 10 case studies are known to be near completion and should be received in the near future. The National Committee requested the executive officer to prepare a report on the case studies for the next meeting. The National Committee also requested the executive officer to place the issue of case studies on the agenda for the April joint meeting of the ACLRI and the ACBC.

8. CODE OF CONDUCT.

The executive officer informed the meeting that the advisory committee for the CODE OF CONDUCT has had three meetings. A questionnaire has been sent to all dioceses and religious institutes requesting dialogue and comment on the issue of a code of conduct. Questionnaires are not due back until mid August 1997. Comments on draft Code's of Conduct by National Committee members have been gratefully received by the Committee.

The executive officer also reported on a meeting with the executive of the National Council of Priests. The executive will support the process of dialogue about a Code

of Conduct. The executive officer has been requested to write an article for the next edition of the NCP newsletter.

9. ACSWC/CENTACARE SYDNEY JOINT STUDY.

Mr. Bill Johnstone was welcomed to the meeting and asked to give an overview of the joint ACSWC/Centacare Sydney project. Mr Johnstone spoke to a plan of contents for the final report and indicated that following discussions with Bishop Robinson and Father Cappo that the project has been divided into 2 stages with a report on child sexual assault matters being completed in time for the April meeting of the ACBC and the second stage regarding adult relationships being completed in time for the November meeting of the ACBC.

The following issues were discussed for clarification: whether the final document will be a confidential or open document (the National Committee will recommend that it be an open document); the document should be in personal names (Mr Johnstone and Mr O'Connor and not the ACSWC and Centacare Sydney); the style of writing is very important; questions should be posed rather than dogmatic statements made; the academic freedom of the authors is to be maintained; a supportive role should be played by the committee that also gave support with the writing of the National Therapy report; copyright is to be held by the ACBC and the ACLRI.

10. NATIONAL THERAPY PROGRAM.

Mr. Neil Harrigan was welcomed to the meeting to give an update on the National Therapy Program. Mr Harrigan informed the meeting that the program will be fully operational by April 1997. 13 Referrals for assessment have already been made by some bishops and religious leaders. Seven staff are soon to be appointed. The program will initially be based in Sydney and Melbourne. Discussions are taking place with various religious institutes in Sydney regarding accommodation possibilities for people with participating in aspects of the program. The National Committee thanked Mr Harrigan and the interim board for the most valuable and important work that they are performing on behalf of bishops and religious leaders.

11. MELBOURNE ARCHDIOCESAN PROCEDURES.

Bishop Connors, Mr Laurie Rolls and Father Cappo gave the National Committee an update on the current status of the Melbourne procedures. The Committee was informed that Care Link, the counselling service set up for victims appears to be operating at a high level of professionalism; 80 cases are currently before the independent Commissioner; some complainants are bypassing the Commissioner and going straight to the counselling service; the issue of access to the independent commissioner was discussed by the committee.

12. MEETINGS BETWEEN BISHOPS/RELIGIOUS LEADERS AND VICTIMS.

The National Committee noted that there has been an increase in the number of bishops and religious leaders who are meeting face to face with victims. The Committee was reminded that the various Centacare offices were initially mentioned as being available to establish these meetings if requested.

13. CORRESPONDENCE.

Correspondence from Centacare Perth, the Vocations Director of the Diocese of Toowoomba and a press release from the Eros Foundation were noted.

14. REPORT FROM CCI.

Mr. Laurie Rolls mentioned that 26 new claims have been lodged; there are 6 new offenders in this group.

Mr Paul Serong gave a summary report of the Chicago Conference that he attended in late 1996. This conference was organised by CCI's counterpart in the USA. 400 people attended by invitation only. The conference further advanced the healing process and provided a forum for more openness and sharing of ideas. Archbishop Sheen of Santa Fe made a major contribution to the conference. Mr Serong noted the disturbing trend of an increase in the number of sexual harassment claims.

The benefits of a similar conference for Australia is to be investigated by the executive officer in discussion with Mr Serong and will be placed on the next meeting agenda.

15 REPORT FROM ACLRI.

Fr. Kevin Dance CP informed the meeting that he has discussed the implementation of *Towards Healing* and in particular the establishment of the Professional Standards Resource Groups with the appropriate bodies representing religious leaders in the States and Territories

16 ANY OTHER BUSINESS.

16.1 Regarding any complaints against members of PSRG'S, the National Committee advised that such complaints should be addressed as they come rather than a formal policy on the matter developed.

16.2 The issue of the reinstatement of offenders was discussed. It was noted that some courts have taken into account the decision of bishops not to reinstate in the court's sentencing.

16.3 The executive officer informed the meeting that in his discussions with Father McKenna Secretary of the ACBC that the issue of the status of the committee was raised. The point was made that the NCPS now sits under neither the ACBC or the ACLRI and needs to address this issue.

Father Lucas informed the meeting that in his opinion the NCPS sits under both the ACBC and the ACLRI and that there should be no problem regarding the legal status of the NCPS.

The executive officer will liaise with Father Lucas and prepare a written response to Father McKenna on this matter.

16.4 The executive officer informed the meeting that he is currently addressing the implementation of points 10.5 (seminarians and those in houses of formation signing a declaration that there is nothing , to their knowledge, in their past that could lead to a complaint of sexual abuse or harassment) and 10.4 regarding the transfer of clergy or religious from one diocese to another. A sub-committee of the religious on the National Committee was asked to assist the executive officer in drawing up guidelines on this matter.

16.5 The executive officer informed the meeting that he will present an audited statement of the 1996 professional standards accounts at the next meeting.

The meeting closed at 3.15pm.

**NEXT MEETING TO BE HELD AT ST PAUL'S
SEMINARY ON WEDNESDAY THE 9TH APRIL 1997
2.30PM TO 6.00PM.**