

## TIMELINE

➤ **1920:** The North Coast Children's Home Inc created in Lismore as a "district home" for orphaned and neglected children by the Church of England and St Andrew's Anglican Church Lismore. Originally run in rental homes and private homes.

➤ **1936:** The committee running the home bought and remodelled an old police station, next to St Andrew's Anglican Church Lismore, and the home was officially opened.

➤ **1945-1959:** Matron Martin placed in charge. Royal Commission witness Tommy Campion—who grew up in the orphanage—alleges that during this time the women dealt out "thrashings and torture". Campion also said that during his time various children were also abused by Anglican clergy.

➤ **1984:** The North Coast Children's Home incorporated.

➤ **Early 2000s:** Changes its name to CASPA (Child and Adolescent Specialist Program).



➤ **2002:** Clergyman Alan Kitchingman sentenced to two and a half years jail after pleading guilty to sexually assaulting a 13-year-old boy at the home in 1975.

➤ **2005:** Campion, then 58, writes a letter detailing his experiences to the Anglican Church of Australia. The church passes the letter on to the Diocese of Grafton. Pat Comben replies, offering counselling and compensation, but Campion decides to contact other victims instead.

➤ 41 former residents launch claims against the Anglican Church.

➤ **2007:** Anglican Church offers a total of \$825,000 to the 41 former residents claiming sexual and physical abuse at the hands of by clergymen and staff.

➤ **Nov 2012:** A Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse announced.

# Shame led deacon to abandon church

MATTHEW BENNS

THE deacon who led the Anglican Church's response to allegations of child abuse in Lismore quit the church in protest just moments before stepping into the witness box at the royal commission into child sex abuse.

Pat Comben, former registrar at the Diocese of Grafton, said he should no longer be referred to by the title reverend and was not even sure he could still call himself a Christian after 50 years in the church.

The royal commission is examining the response of the Anglican Diocese of Grafton to harrowing claims of physical and sexual child abuse over a 48-year period and involving 12 members of clergy and staff at the former North Coast Children's Home in Lismore.

"Some of us do have some guilt and take some responsibility for this," he said after a gruelling two days of evidence finished yesterday.

The commission heard Mr Comben took an argumentative approach with the more than 40 victims and instructed lawyers to make a compensation offer of \$825,000 "and not a penny more".

The claimants were finally given a settlement that came to \$10,000 each after costs—despite the diocese trustees having assets worth more than \$200 million.

Pat Comben quit the Anglican church in protest. Picture: Ross Shultz

Outside the commission Mr Comben said he took the tough line under orders from the church hierarchy and if he had not "I would have been sacked by the church".

He asked the head of the diocese to sign his resignation papers moments before he took the stand, in protest at how "history is being rewritten by some members of the church".

"This has to be the lowest point of my career," said a former education and environment minister in Queensland's Goss Government, who now runs a caravan park. "I can understand how people who have been abused consider suicide."

Former Lismore home resident Richard "Tommy" Campion raised allegations of abuse in a 2005 letter to the diocese that named abusers.

But Mr Comben did not follow official channels to alert the police, despite a telephone conversation with one of the accused priests confirming guilt in Mr Comben's mind.

And he found another convicted paedophile priest still listed in the Anglican Directory—known unofficially as the "stud book"—but took no disciplinary action.

The church did not officially inform police about the full scale of the abuse at the home until 2013.

On Mr Comben's argumentative approach with lawyers, Justice Peter McClellan, said: "Did it occur to you that you shouldn't be talking in an argumentative way until you had been able to talk to these people?"

Mr Comben conceded: "I was wrong".

## RAISE GLASS TO HEMMES

SYDNEY hotel entrepreneurs John and Justin Hemmes were inducted into the hotel industry's hall of fame last night.

The father and son behind the \$500 million Merivale empire were honoured at the 2013 Australian Hotel Association NSW Awards for Excellence. The award recognised their contribution to the hospitality industry.

Other big winners were The Clovelly Hotel and the Central Hotel in Shellharbour, hotels of the year in the city and country.



Justin Hemmes.

## Pyne to review Gonski funding deals

STATES are demanding the Abbott government stand by its election pledge to honour Labor's schools funding agreements after Education Minister Christopher Pyne said he would review the reforms.

Mr Pyne accused the previous Labor government of leaving the Gonski reforms in a shambles, saying deals had not been finalised with the Catholic

education sector, nor with the Victorian and Tasmanian governments.

Despite a campaign promise to honour the Better Schools plan, Mr Pyne said he would have to go back to the "drawing board" to reconsider how the funding model was delivered.

The change of heart sparked concerns from states, with Tasmanian Education Minister Nick McKim say-

ing the Abbott government must commit itself to the agreed funding deals.

A Victorian government spokesman said Mr Abbott had promised to honour the agreement struck on schools funding in August. "Victoria made it clear that, along with Victorian schools and school communities, we expect the Commonwealth to honour this funding," he said.