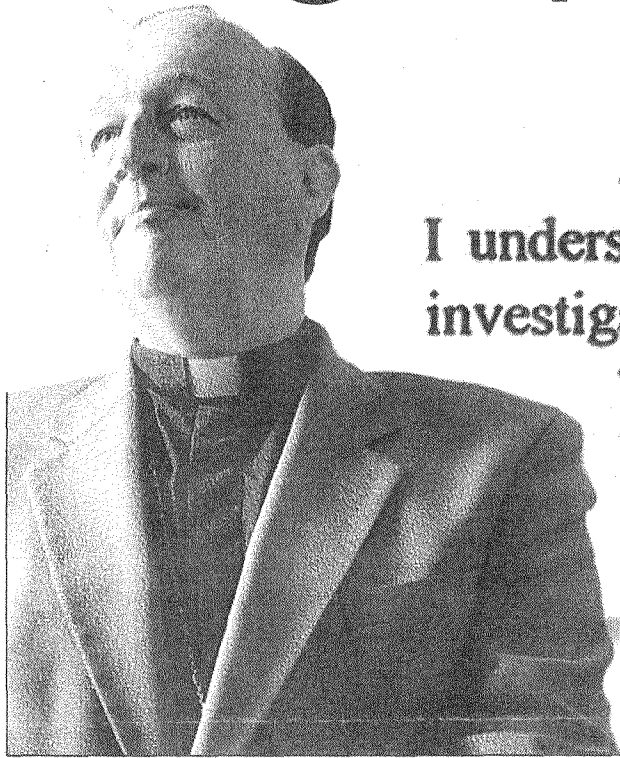


Catholic school sex abuse tip-off

POLICE TOOK MONTH TO ACT



Archbishop's letter to The Commissioner

I understand that, following the allegations being investigated in 1991... (the man went) to Queensland where he currently resides at Gin Gin. I also understand that in 1998 extradition was considered but was not pursued.

ADVT.
Fri 22/3/02



By COLIN JAMES
and NHADA GOODFELLOW

POLICE were alerted to the interstate location of a Catholic Church school bus driver accused of sexually abusing children four weeks ago, it has emerged.

However, they did not ask Queensland detectives to arrest him until two days ago - when they learnt allegations surrounding the man were about to be made public by the Catholic Archbishop of Adelaide, the

Most Rev Philip Wilson. Many parents of pupils at the school where the man was employed between 1986 and 1991 also only became aware of the claims for the first time on Wednesday night when couriers delivered letters from the Archbishop to their homes.

In other developments yesterday:

ARCHBISHOP Wilson revealed the principal of the school where the students were allegedly sexually abused and indecently photographed had been removed from his position.

THE State Government indicated it

would urgently review child protection legislation in South Australia, while Police Minister Pat Conlon called for a detailed report on the police handling of the case.

PUBLIC Advocate John Harley said Queensland police first found the man in 1998 but police decided not to seek extradition, citing costs as one factor.

The Advertiser has learnt Archbishop Wilson wrote to Police Commissioner Mal Hyde on February 21 with information that the man was living in Gin Gin, a small town 52km southwest of Bundaberg.

His letter said, in part: "I understand

that, following the allegations being investigated in 1991... (the man went) to Queensland where he currently resides. I also understand that in 1998 extradition was considered but not pursued."

Bundaberg detectives have confirmed they were phoned by SA police for the first time on Wednesday, asking if they could find the man.

Yesterday the handling of the allegations by police, the church and the school was strongly criticised by parents of alleged victims and their representatives.

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Police took month to act

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The Director of Public Prosecutions, Paul Rofe, QC, said he had no knowledge of a request to his office from police to extradite the man in 1998.

"I have no memory of considering extradition but police don't always get us involved," he said.

An internal police investigation is now under way into whether the extradition had been sought and who was responsible for not authorising the application.

A separate inquiry - likely to be undertaken by a retired Supreme Court judge - will also examine how the church handled the allegations. The review will include

why the school did not offer counselling or notify church authorities and parents of pupils.

Archbishop Wilson said the principal had been moved to another position about four months ago, "where there's no contact or responsibility for children".

Parents of alleged victims who have formed a support group said they did not know about the allegations until last year.

"The way this has been covered up, the way we have never known, the way it has been handled by the church is just disgusting," one parent said. Archbishop Wilson said he was "very concerned" over the school's failure to report the matter to church

authorities and to arrange counselling.

"That's something that will be subject to further investigation and I'm sure that if there are statutory problems that they'll be matters that will have to be referred to proper authorities," he said.

Police revealed a taskforce, codenamed Operation Cormorant, had been formed to review the initial investigation.

A spokeswoman for Mr Hyde said he would not comment further.

● *The Advertiser* has not named the school or the man to protect the identity of his alleged victims.

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