

Grafton Bishop resigns over abuse claims

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The head of the Anglican Diocese in Grafton has resigned over the way allegations of abuse at a NSW north coast children's home were handled.

Bishop Keith Slater on Friday apologised for his past failings in managing the allegations of physical, psychological and sexual abuse at the North Coast Childrens Home in Lismore between 1940 and the 1980s.

"As a sign of my recognition of these matters and in the hope that it may contribute towards healing and wholeness for those who are abused I forthwith resign from being the Bishop of the Diocese of Grafton," he said in a statement.

Bishop Slater said the diocese had received a number of allegations of abuse at the home between the 1940s and 1980s.

The alleged perpetrators included staff, visiting clergy, members of holiday host families and other residents.

Bishop Slater said an audit of the diocese's professional standards protocol in November 2012, in response to the royal commission into sex abuse, showed protocols had not always been applied "specifically in matters associated with claims of abuse at the North Coast Childrens Home".

He said he acknowledged that he had failed to ensure compliance with the protocol.

"Some matters detailing sexual abuse at the North Coast Childrens Home were not referred to the Professional Standards Director as they should have been," he said.

Bishop Slater said the diocese had settled 39 claims in 2007. It also informed police of sex abuse allegations relating to two members of the clergy who had since died.

Additional claims were received between 2008 and 2011, the diocese said.

Some of these were settled but other alleged victims were told the Diocese of Grafton was no longer willing to make financial settlements.

Bishop Slater said he responded to some of these complaints personally but others were referred to the diocesan solicitor.

"I acknowledge that the Diocese of Grafton should have received and investigated each new claim put before it and that there was no justification for the decision that new claims would not have access to the same financial settlement process made available to the earlier claimants," he said.

"I acknowledge that our offer of a pastoral care package was poorly communicated and did not provide an adequate response to meet the immediate needs of the complainants.

He said alleged victims of abuse who had been "turned away" were being contacted by the Professional Standards Director and the diocese would respond to them appropriately.

"The Diocese of Grafton had never before dealt with complaints of such magnitude as those associated with the North Coast Childrens Home," he said.

Information about the "failings" had also been passed on the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sex Abuse.

Archdeacon Greg Ezzy will act as administrator for the diocese until the appointment of a new bishop.

He said Bishop Slater had made a serious error of judgment.

"But we commend our bishop for his honest acknowledgment of mistakes in this regard," he said in a statement.

"We support the genuine apology he has made to survivors of abuse."

Source: <http://news.smh.com.au/breaking-news-national/grafton-bishop-resigns-over-abuse-claims-20130517-2jrh6.html>