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**ROCKHAMPTON CONGREGATION
OF THE SISTERS OF MERCY
OF AUSTRALIA**

Media Release issued 8 June 1999 by Sr Di-Anne Rowan, Congregational Leader of the Rockhampton Sisters of Mercy in response to the release of The Forde Inquiry Report.

Sr Di-Anne said that although she has not had the opportunity to see a copy of the Report, the Rockhampton Sisters of Mercy welcomed the release of the Forde Inquiry Report and thanked the Inquiry not only on their thoroughness in compiling the Report but also for the great sensitivity that the Commissioners and the Inquiry staff showed to the many people who gave evidence or provided submissions to the Inquiry.

"Having had the privilege of meeting so many who were children at Neerkol and listening to them, I know how personally distressing it would have been for Mrs Forde and her assistant commissioners to hear first hand the experiences of so many former residents of institutions in Queensland. We believe it is vitally important for their pain and suffering to be heard and documented if we are going to be able to work towards achieving genuine and lasting reconciliation." Sr Di-Anne said.

Sr Di-Anne said that the Rockhampton Sisters of Mercy and the Catholic Diocese had issued a full public apology to the former residents of St Joseph's Home, Neerkol nearly two years ago and that this apology had been accepted on behalf of the former residents by the representatives of the Neerkol Action Support Group. "I know how important it was for the former residents of Neerkol to receive our apology and acknowledgement of their suffering. I hope that the State Government and the relevant Religious authorities can see their way clear to issue a formal statement which recognises the harm done to some children in Queensland institutions" Sr Di-Anne said.

Di-Anne said that she hoped that the State Government would give consideration to all the recommendations made by the Inquiry. "We cannot change the past but we can as a community do everything in our power to ensure that the lessons of the past are learnt and that we do provide a safer care environment for the children of today and tomorrow" Sr Di-Anne added.

"We cannot forget those today who are still suffering as a result of abuse in the past. We were heartened to see that many of the initiatives that we have undertaken, such as the establishment of a Professional Standards Office to assist with the provision of counselling and other services to help the former residents with their needs today, have also been recommended by the Forde Report. With regard to the issue of compensation addressed in the Report, we are currently finalising an out of court settlement involving the payment of compensation to many of the former Neerkol residents who had taken legal action against us" Sr Di-Anne said.

"It is also our hope that the Report Chapter dealing specifically with St Joseph's Home, Neerkol will be able to be made public as soon as possible" Sr Di-Anne said.