

"SJH15"

The Anglican Diocese of Grafton has been provided with 600 pages of statements and documents containing allegations of abuse to 42 former residents of the North Coast Childrens Home.

It is understood that a number of the claims go back more than fifty years and cover matters including discipline in the home and sexual assaults.

Diocesan Registrar Rev Pat Comben said he was surprised at the amount of personal detail of the material while "substantial threshold legal and responsibility questions remain totally unresolved."

The Church has been asked by the claimant's solicitors to respond before the 20th October, a date Rev Comben says is unrealistic.

"It has taken the solicitors for the claimants almost twelve months to collect and collate this material and we will require time to properly assess it and respond," Rev Comben said.

"Our legal advice is clear that there are substantial hurdles to be overcome by the solicitors for the claimants.

"I would hope that these issues can be resolved before increased costs are borne by the individual claimants supplying further personal and medical information which may not be needed because no claim can be made.

"I am concerned that a number of people mentioned as alleged perpetrators are not and never were staff members of the home or even church workers.

"These individuals, many of whom are still living, named as alleged perpetrators have a right to state their response to the allegations and even have their day in court.

"There are also, I believe, substantial factual errors in the material given to us about the home and its management.

"Increasingly I see these matters as being a challenge to the very community of Lismore.

"We have a wide range of evidence that points to the home being a great North Coast community facility, run and 'owned' by the community, with tremendous support from individuals and service clubs.

"Some of the matters complained of might have been standard practice in Australia some decades ago.

"Some of the complaints being raised are a potential affront to all those individuals who willingly gave their time and money to a home that in their eyes did an essential and great job.

"The Church will do all it can to speed the matter up, but in view of the legal uncertainties will continue to contest the matters as presently put to us in the name of all former staff, the wider community of Lismore and the church itself," Rev Comben said.