

STATEMENT OF KEITH AINGE

I, KEITH AINGE, REDACTED state:

1. I was born on 11 February 1951 and I am currently 63 years of age.
2. I am married to Sue Ainge and we have 2 children.
3. I am the Senior Pastor at Desert Life Church located at 32 Undoolya Road, Alice Springs.
4. I served as the National Secretary of the Assemblies of God Australia (AOGA) from May 1995 to May 2011.
5. The AOGA became Australian Christian Churches (ACC) in 2007.
6. The Royal Commission has made inquiry into allegations of child sexual abuse made against Frank Houston and Kenneth John Sandilands. I respond to this inquiry as set out below.

Hillsong Church – Frank Houston (Response to Item 1 in Royal Commission letter dated 28 August 2014)

7. Frank Houston had been the Superintendent of the New Zealand Assemblies of God movement. He moved to Australia in or around 1977; however he did not seek an Assemblies of God in Australia credential until about 1979 or 1980. He became the NSW State Executive Superintendent in late 1980. He was the Senior Pastor of Christian Life Centre, which subsequently became an AOGA affiliated church.
8. At the time of being credentialed, there was no suspicion that Frank Houston had engaged in illegal or improper sexual conduct.
9. I first became aware of the allegations against Frank Houston on 22 December 1999. I received a phone call from the then National President, Brian Houston, asking me to set up an urgent National Executive Meeting. He did not provide me with details for why this meeting was required or what was to be discussed. I contacted all Executive Members and invited them to attend this urgent meeting.
10. On 22 December 1999, I attended this Special Executive meeting, which was held at Sydney Airport (Qantas Club). The meeting was chaired by Brian Houston, after revealing the reason for the urgent meeting, Brian Houston then handed over chairmanship of the meeting to the Vice President, John Lewis. Brian Houston remained in the meeting but did not participate in any decision making. Brian Houston told us that his father had been accused of a single act of sexual abuse 30 years earlier.
11. Brian Houston also advised the meeting that the complainant did not wish to be identified and did not wish to make a formal complaint, but that Frank Houston had confessed to the act.

12. The National Executive were not told the age of the complainant, only that he was male. Brian Houston advised us that the offence occurred in Australia, when Frank Houston was visiting from New Zealand (and whilst he was a New Zealand credentialed minister).
13. I did not enquire further of the actual details of the offence or complainant, because Brian Houston had told us that the complainant wanted to remain anonymous and did not want to make a formal complaint.
14. We did consider whether we needed to compulsorily report the offence to police. However, my recollection is that legal advice had been obtained, and this advice was to the effect that the complainant could report the matter to police given his age, and that there was no obligation on the National Executive to report the matter to police. I do not recall where the legal advice came from, or who sought the legal advice.
15. At the meeting held on 22 December 1999, the National Executive decided that:
 - a. Frank Houston's credentials be withdrawn;
 - b. he refrain from public ministry for 12 months;
 - c. he be invited to enter the AOG restoration program;
 - d. he be placed under the supervision of Ian Woods (State Superintendant NSW);
 - e. he not receive his credential until the NSW Superintendant recommends to the National Executive at the expiration of at least two years that he receive this credential; and
 - f. he be offered counselling support if required (see Annexure KA-1 for a copy of the meeting minutes).
16. Brian Houston was asked to notify Frank Houston of the decision, on the basis that he was the Senior Pastor of his church and the complaint had been communicated to the National Executive by Brian Houston.
17. Ongoing supervision was arranged with Ian Woods, and he was advised of what had occurred.
18. No public communication was made regarding the National Executive's decision, because the Restoration Policy stipulates that confidentiality should be maintained as far as possible. In this instance, the National Executive believed that appropriate steps had been taken, and that there was considered no risk of any further offending by Frank Houston.
19. The reference in the Minutes to "Mad Dog Morgan" is a reference to the person who communicated the complaint to Brian Houston.
20. On 22 November 2000, a further special executive meeting was called in relation to Frank Houston. This meeting was also called by Brian Houston.
21. During this meeting, Brian Houston outlined a meeting he had with a man from New Zealand who discussed an alleged event of inappropriate sexual behaviour that took place 33 years ago between himself and Frank Houston. There was also an Assemblies of God New Zealand Executive meeting to take place on 26 November 2000, to investigate into rumours of inappropriate sexual behaviour involving Frank Houston and between two to five people.

22. Having made disclosure of his conversations, Brian Houston then left the meeting for discussions to take place on appropriate action by the AOGA. John Lewis chaired the meeting from this point.
23. It was decided at this meeting that because of Frank Houston's profile, an investigation would be carried out by the National Executive and not the State Executive.
24. At this meeting the following resolutions were made:
 - a. As the allegations had not been put to Frank Houston as yet, natural justice was to prevail and that consideration be given for action to be taken if the allegations proved true;
 - b. Due to the profile of Frank Houston, the National Executive would handle the investigation, as opposed to the State Executive;
 - c. It was confirmed that on the available evidence, the allegations against Frank Houston were allegations of child molestation;
 - d. Robert Fergusson, with a witness, was to interview Frank Houston as soon as possible to confront him with the allegations and ascertain whether Frank Houston would admit the allegations. It was also agreed that Robert Fergusson would advise Frank Houston that his credentials were still withdrawn and that he would be unable to preach until the allegations had been dealt with to the satisfaction of the National Executive;
 - e. If Frank Houston did not agree to the allegations made against him, the National Executive would follow the investigative procedure as outlined in the Manual on the Restoration and Reinstatement of Disciplined Ministers;
 - f. If Frank Houston admitted to the allegations, it was agreed that Frank Houston would never have his credential reissued and that Frank Houston never be allowed to preach again;
 - g. On completion of the investigations, the State Presidents of the AOGA be informed of the decision and that the National Executive would make the situation known to all AOGA ministers, should Frank Houston fail to comply with complete withdrawal from Ministry;
 - h. John Lewis and I were nominated to travel to New Zealand and meet with the New Zealand Assemblies of God Executive to explain the stand taken by the AOGA Executive;
 - i. John Lewis and I were to prepare a statement following our return from New Zealand to be used if people were to make enquiries about Frank Houston; and
 - j. John Lewis would meet with Frank Houston upon return from New Zealand to advise him about the results of the investigation.
25. At this point in time, we understood that Frank Houston was suffering dementia. Because of this, we decided to ask Robert Fergusson to interview Frank Houston, as he was a respected minister within the movement, considered to be honest and trustworthy, and had the confidence of Frank Houston because he had worked with him over an extended period of time.
26. The above decisions were agreed by all members present and carried unanimously.

27. Restoration was discussed for Frank Houston, however given the seriousness of the allegations, it was decided that restoration would not be possible if the allegations were substantiated (see Annexure KA-2 for a copy of the meeting minutes).

Report on meeting with New Zealand Assemblies of God Executive

28. On or about 28 November 2000, John Lewis and I flew to New Zealand to meet with the NZ Assemblies of God (AOG) Executive and to have a discussion with them regarding Frank Houston.
29. The purpose of our meeting was to:
- a. Ascertain details of accusations that had been made against Frank Houston;
 - b. Advise the NZ AOG Executive of the AOGA National Executive proposed action;
 - c. Determine a common position for both Executives.
30. Upon meeting with the NZ AOG Executive, they confirmed that the rumours regarding Frank Houston had been circulating in the last three years. These rumours had never been communicated to the National Executive of the AOGA.
31. The rumours related to Frank Houston having inappropriate conduct with young boys in excess of 30 years previous. A total of six (6) allegations had been received by the NZ AOG Executive.
32. The NZ AOG Executive had made an apology to the victims, on its own behalf.
33. The complainants did not want to publicise the offences, but wanted some form of justice done.
34. John Lewis then advised the NZ AOG Executive that Frank Houston's credentials had been withdrawn for the last 12 months and that if the allegations were substantiated, then the AOGA National Executive had resolved that Frank Houston would not be allowed to Minister again.
35. In relation to the AOGA National Executive decision, the NZ AOG agreed with the course of action taken and a joint statement by both Executive teams was drafted for use by either Executive team in the event of answering genuine queries regarding Frank Houston (see Annexure KA-3 for a copy of the Statement concerning Frank Houston).

Meeting with Frank Houston

36. On about 30 November 2000, John Lewis and I returned to Sydney and met with Frank Houston.
37. John Lewis, Robert Fergusson, the family doctor and I went to visit Frank and Hazel Houston at their house.
38. At the beginning of the meeting, John Lewis reminded Frank and Hazel Houston of the decision of the National Executive and that our visit was part of the investigations.
39. John Lewis outlined details of the four (4) allegations raised against Frank Houston. John Lewis mentioned two (2) further allegations, but that the complainants were not willing to release their names.

40. Frank Houston tried to recall the incidents and the people involved, but he was unable to recall the first three allegations made. Frank Houston did not deny them, accepting that it was a continuing problem during that period of time, but he did not confess to them.
41. When confronted with the name of the fourth person and the allegation made, Frank Houston confessed that an improper incident had taken place.
42. On the basis of this confession, John Lewis then explained and confirmed to Frank Houston the resolution made at the earlier AOGA National Executive meeting that Frank Houston's credential would never be reissued; and that Frank Houston would never be allowed to practice and preach in Ministry again.
43. Frank Houston's response was that as he was now retired, he would not preach any more.
44. John Lewis then explained to Frank Houston that a statement was being prepared to explain the situation to those that may have a genuine enquiry arising from the rumours heard; however, this statement would not be published, unless Frank Houston failed to keep his commitment not to preach or unless the extent of the rumours made it imperative for the AOGA National Executive to do so.
45. After the meeting, it was agreed that Robert Fergusson would prepare a short, simple confession to be signed by Frank Houston.
46. I am advised that Frank Houston did not sign any confession; and I have not seen a copy of any confession as signed by Frank Houston.
47. A copy of the report made by John Lewis and I is Annexure **KA-4** to this Statement.
48. None of the alleged victims made any contact with the AOGA requesting compensation at the time. Frank Houston was credentialed by the AOGA in the early 1980's. The alleged abuses occurred at least ten years previously, whilst Frank Houston was a resident in New Zealand and credentialed to the New Zealand AOG.
49. There is no organisational or corporate link between the AOGA and the New Zealand AOG. Our connection then and now remains informal.

Further matters relating to Frank Houston

50. On 24 December 2001, I, together with every other ordained minister, received a letter from John Lewis advising of the outcome of the investigation into Frank Houston. This was a letter that I co-wrote with John Lewis. This was in line with the National Executive decision to advise all ordained and probationary ministers of the AOGA of the outcome of the investigation. A copy of the agreed statement to be issued for genuine enquiries was included in this letter (see Annexure **KA-5** for a copy of the letter dated 24 December 2001).
51. We received a further letter from Hazel Houston, complaining about the severity of Frank Houston's discipline. I did not keep a copy of this letter, and am unable to locate a copy of it. I responded to

that letter, but do not recall the content of my response (other than to reiterate that the decision made was appropriate in the circumstances) and have not kept a copy of it. This letter was discussed in a National Executive meeting on 2 to 4 April 2002 (see Annexure KA-6 for a copy of the meeting minutes).

52. A year later, on 9 December 2002, we were copied into a number of email correspondences from AHG [redacted] (a complainant), Philip Powell (of Christian Witnesses) and Darren Boehm to the NZ AOG Executive.
53. AHG [redacted] stated that he was abused as a child by Frank Houston at Lower Hutt, New Zealand. AHG [redacted]'s lawyers had contacted the NZ AOG Executive and the NZ AOG Executive was responding to AHG [redacted] through their solicitors.
54. At the time, the AOGA did not consider that there was anything the AOGA could do given that we had acted on our resolutions and the complaint was not directed to the AOGA, but to the NZ AOG Executive (see Annexure KA-7 for a copy of the email correspondences we received). The NZ body and the Australian body are completely independent of each other.
55. On 21 December 2002, we were also issued a copy of the NZ AOG Executive letter to all ordained and probationary ministers of the AOG in New Zealand. The letter issued was reflective of the letter John Lewis released a year earlier and canvassed the same decision the AOGA Executive had executed (see Annexure KA-8 for a copy of the letter dated 21 December 2002).
56. On 30 January 2004, I received a letter from Ian Zerna, Senior Minister of Coastlife Church. Mr Zerna sought clarification on Frank Houston's discipline and what he was allowed to do in terms of praying over people and delivering a prophetic word. (see Annexure KA-9 for a copy of this letter). I responded to this letter, and a copy is attached at Annexure KA-10.

Response of the AOGA to an allegation of child sexual abuse by AHA [redacted] (Response to Item 2 in Royal Commission letter dated 28 August 2014)

57. I have no knowledge or recollection of any communication between AHA [redacted] and Assemblies of God in Australia. AHA [redacted] may have been the complainant in the 1999 investigation referred to in my statement, however the name of this complainant was never advised to myself or the National Executive, nor did we need know the identity of the complainant, given his request for confidentiality and Frank Houston's admission to the offence.

Policies, procedures and practices of AOGA in relation to complaints of child sexual abuse in place at the time you became aware of the allegations concerning Frank Houston, and their application (if any) in relation to Frank Houston and the relevant complainants. (Response to Item 3 in Royal Commission letter dated 28 August 2014)

58. The policy in place at the time of the allegation first being brought to our attention was "A Program for the Restoration and Reinstatement of Disciplined Ministers: Administration Manual - Adopted by the National Conference of the Assemblies of God in Australia – May 1999" ('the Manual') (see Annexure KA-11 for a copy of the Manual).

59. The Manual needed to be referred to in cases relating to serious sexual misconduct (mandatory requirement; refer to Extent of Discipline page 6 of the Manual).
60. The Manual states in Appendix 1, Part IV B 1.b. that child molestation (sexual involvement of adults with adolescents or children), is considered a perverse sin (refer to page 19 of the Manual).
61. The Manual also outlined that any sexual misconduct referred to the Executive must be dealt with according to this policy (refer to Extent of Discipline page 6 of the Manual).
62. Page 7 of the manual refers to dismissal from ministry. This occurs when sexual misconduct has been admitted or appears highly likely and it is not appropriate to admit the offender to a program of rehabilitation.
63. The National Executive had reached this conclusion at a special meeting held on 22 November 2000; and the decision to not re-issue Frank Houston's credential and not allow him to preach again, was in effect, dismissal from Ministry (refer to paragraph 14 f. of this Statement).
64. This action was carried out following our meeting with NZ AOG and Frank Houston's admission to improper sexual conduct of an allegation (refer to paragraph 40 of this Statement).
65. The Complaint Procedure is set out on page 8 and 9 of the Manual. In referring to the process, we have complied with the policy from receiving the complaint, to making resolutions regarding outcome(s) of the investigation, and implementing the resolution(s) as findings were made on the allegation(s).
66. The Manual is still the foundational policy for dealing with sexual misconduct of AOG ministers. A number of new policies and by-laws have been developed since 1999 to strengthen and clarify the ACC's approach to dealing with sexual misconduct and protect children from child abuse.
67. To illustrate, the ACC have developed a strong child protection policy that emphasises the importance of mandatory reporting of all accusations of child abuse. The AOGA Minister's Manual dedicated a Chapter to discussing managing child abuse (see Annexure KA-12 for a copy of this chapter); and for an example of an earlier developed child protection policy in 2004 see Annexure KA-13 for a copy of the AOGA TAS state branch child protection policy.
68. The AOGA released a Ministers Code of Conduct that emphasises the importance of appropriate behaviour, specifically in the area of sexuality (see Annexure KA-14 for a copy of this Ministerial Code and refer to Part 3 that deals with Sexual Behaviour). This Code has been further developed and advanced by the ACC.
69. The ACC have developed a grievance procedure that is consistent with the Manual but clarifies a procedure to be followed when a complaint is received. This includes mandatory reporting (for child safety issues); suspension of credentials and full investigation (see Annexure KA-15 for a copy of this child protection policy).

The AOG's governance of or oversight over Hillsong Church at the time that AOG became aware of the allegations against Frank Houston (Response to Item 4 in Royal Commission letter dated 28 August 2014)

70. Hillsong Church at the time of the allegations against Frank Houston was an affiliated church of the AOGA. Hillsong Church is a self-governing church committed to working together with other churches in the AOGA movement for the purpose of mutual support and the spread of the gospel in Australia and the World. Hillsong Church is a separate legal entity, autonomous and self-contained.
71. The AOGA recognised the necessity of administration of some matters at a state or national level. When the allegation against Frank Houston came to light, the AOGA National Executives made the decision to investigate the allegation at a National level (without the inclusion of Pastor Brian Houston). The investigation was carried out in accordance with the Manual.
72. The National Executive at the time was established by the United Constitution of the Assemblies of God in Australia. A purpose of the National Conference was to receive and consider reports from the states, departments, officers and committees and, where appropriate, make any decisions or recommendations arising therefrom (see Annexure KA-16 for a copy of the United Constitution and the National by-law).

Conclusion

73. The decision to dismiss and exclude Frank Houston from Ministry was not considered lightly. We factored in Frank Houston's contribution to building the AOGA movement in the early years and his seniority in membership. However, the seriousness of the allegation(s) made despite their age, the subsequent admission to improper conduct, a higher onus of trust and responsibility expected of Frank Houston due to level of seniority and, to a lesser extent, Frank Houston's ongoing medical issues, justified our decision to dismiss and exclude Frank Houston from Ministry.

Northside Christian Centre – Kenneth John Sandilands (Response to Item 5 in Royal Commission letter dated 28 August 2014)

74. Northside Christian College is an associated entity of Northside Christian Church. Encompass Church is the Business Name of Northside Christian Church and is an affiliated church of the ACC (formerly the AOGA). Northside Christian Church controls and is responsible for Northside Christian College. Encompass Church's Senior Pastors are John and Lois Spinella.
75. Kenneth Sandilands was a teacher at Northside Christian College.
76. I cannot recall the first I became aware of the allegations of child sexual abuse against Kenneth Sandilands. It would have been post 1995 (after my election to the national executive), and it would have been prior to Kenneth Sandilands conviction and imprisonment. The extent of my knowledge was reduced to informal conversations with others (including our insurers) on the progression of Kenneth Sandilands case. The first I was formally communicated to regarding Kenneth Sandilands was in October 2001.

77. The offences, which were subject of the criminal proceedings, were said to have occurred during the period 1985-1991. Kenneth Sandilands pleaded guilty to multiple offences of sexual misconduct whilst a teacher at Northside Christian College; and subsequently, civil claims were filed against Northside Christian College.
78. On 10 October 2001, I had a discussion with Northside Christian College's lawyers, Moores Legal regarding insurance coverage of the school. A letter was issued to me on that date. I received this letter when the matter regarding Kenneth Sandilands was nearing conclusion.
79. Moores Legal (on behalf of Northside Christian Centre) sought AOGA's financial assistance in the payment of the civil claim damages. Moores Legal projected that the damages awarded would exceed the school's insurance coverage.
80. Moores Legal asserted that Northside Christian Centre had insurance with AOG Insurance Services. The letter stated that in 1987, a change in the public liability cover excluded protection for schools, churches, pastors or teachers with respect to claims for sexual molestation. Northside Christian Centre felt that the operation of the insurance program was the responsibility of the AOGA National Executive and thus sought the support of the National Executive to financially underwrite any shortfall in damages and the legal costs in defending the proceedings (see Annexure **KA-17** for a copy of this letter from Moores Legal).
81. The above assertion was incorrect as the Australian Christian Services (ACS) was not created until the early 1990's, thus any policy that Northside Christian College had prior to 1990 was not with ACS as their broker. Any change in policy cover would have been with their insurer at the time.
82. On 16-17 October 2001, a National Executive meeting was held and that it was agreed that the National Executive not get involved in the mediation as we were not parties to the dispute; that advice be obtained from our insurers to ascertain our position; and that we clarify the insurance structure by speaking with Andrew Evans (see Annexure **KA-18** for an extract of these minutes).
83. On 19 October 2001, I responded to Moores Legal letter advising them that we would not be part of the mediation proceedings for the civil claims; and that the insurance issue raised had been forwarded to our insurers for their attention (see Annexure **KA-19** for a copy of this letter to Moores Legal).
84. The National Executive of the AOGA decided to not assist Northside Christian Centre by making contribution towards the damages award and this was communicated to Moores Legal.
85. On 14 November 2001, I received another letter from Moores Legal advising of the civil claims outcome and settlement that occurred at mediation. Moores Legal considered that Northside Christian Centre was responsible for approximately 1/3 apportionment of the total damages to be paid.
86. Moores Legal asked us to reconsider our decision to not contribute to the matter in any way (see Annexure **KA-20** for a copy of this letter from Moores Legal).
87. In April 2002 at an AOGA National Executive meeting, I advised the Committee that all the cases relating to Northside Christian College had concluded and that it had cost Encompass Church a

considerable amount of money in awards to the victims. It was also noted that Senior Pastor John Spinella was disappointed at the National Executives decision to not grant assistance when Encompass church was in trouble.

88. The AOGA National Executive resolved that it could not take any responsibility for claims against a church, without setting a dangerous precedent for other churches and future claims (see Annexure KA-6 for a copy of the meeting minutes, refer to point 3.c.). The AOGA had very limited assets with properties and other assets being held by the corporate entity of each affiliated church.
89. The AOGA National and State Executives did not conduct any investigation into the allegations, because Kenneth Sandilands was a teacher of a school. Mr Sandilands was not a Minister as defined or covered by our Manual to cause us to commence investigations.
90. Further, the matter involving Kenneth Sandilands was a criminal matter. The AOGA would not interfere with criminal proceedings by conducting an investigation when proceedings are pending.

The AOG's governance of or oversight over Northside Christian College and/or Encompass Church (formerly Northside Christian Centre) at the time that AOG became aware of the allegations against Kenneth Sandilands (Response to Item 6 in Royal Commission letter dated 28 August 2014)

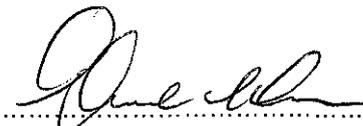
91. Encompass Church at the time of the proceedings against Kenneth Sandilands was an affiliated church of the AOGA. Encompass Church is a self-governing church committed to working together with other churches in the AOGA movement for the purpose of mutual support and the spread of the gospel in Australia and the World. Encompass Church is a separate legal entity, autonomous and self-contained.



Signature

19.9.14

Date



Witness

19/9/2014

Date