

STATEMENT OF JOE BELLO

REDACTED

D.O.B: 3/11/1958

1. An overview of your involvement with the Jehovah's Witnesses Church, including but not limited to an overview of:

- a. the congregations you have attended;
- b. any roles you have held within the Church; and
- c. your role as an elder in the REDACTED Congregation.

1.1. I was baptized as one of Jehovah's Witnesses in 1973.

1.2. I was appointed as an elder in 1991 in Beldon Congregation.

1.3. REDACTED Congregation was formed in late 1991 and I was appointed as an elder there. I have served as an elder in REDACTED Congregation since 1991.

2. Your knowledge and understanding of the systems, policies and procedures in place within the Jehovah's Witness Church to:

- a. respond to allegations or complaints of child sexual abuse made within the Church; and
- b. prevent child sexual abuse within the Church; and
- c. identify child sexual abuse within the Church;

including but not limited to, your understanding of those systems, policies and procedures as they related to your role as an elder in the Church.

2.1. When the elders become aware of an allegation of child sexual abuse, it is reported immediately to the Branch Office. The Branch advises the elders of any requirements

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of mandatory disclosure to the relevant authorities, and gives advice as to handling the wrongdoing according to scriptural principles.

- 2.2. Apart from reporting to the Branch and acting as advised, the body of elders treats child sexual abuse like any serious wrongdoing. Two elders are directed to investigate the complaint and, if substantiated, a judicial committee of three elders is appointed to deal with the matter. If the wrongdoer is repentant, he is reprovved and loses privileges in the congregation. If he is an elder or ministerial servant he is removed from this position immediately. If the wrongdoer is not repentant he is disfellowshipped from the congregation and the congregation is notified of this fact (though they are not notified of the grounds for this).
 - 2.3. Elders have the responsibility to teach all in the congregation to adhere to the clean moral standards in God's Word the Bible. They also help parents understand their responsibility is to protect their children. Assistance is given in various articles in the Watchtower and Awake magazines, and publications such as "Young People Ask" volumes 1 and 2, and "Learn from the Great Teacher".
 - 2.4. Where a person has been found guilty of child sexual abuse, the elders privately counsel him as to appropriate behaviour with children, such as not spending time with them without another adult present, not inviting them to his home, not engaging in displays of affection with children and so on.
 - 2.5. Detailed measures for protecting children in the congregation are provided to elders in the confidential letter dated 1 October 2012 from the Branch to all elders, and the elders' book "Shepherd the Flock of God in your Care" which was issued in about 2010.
 - 2.6. Congregation members are reminded in our Bible instruction that they are obliged to report any serious wrongdoing (including child sexual abuse) to the elders if the wrongdoer will not come forward.
3. **Any training that you have received, participated in, and/or delivered in relation to responding to allegations, prevention, and/or identification of child sexual abuse.**
- 3.1. I have attended many elders' schools, which are courses held over 1 or 2 days every 2 or 3 years. At several of these schools, we have covered the topic of the elders' responsibilities in regard to preventing and dealing with cases of child sexual abuse.

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3.2. There has been a series of letters from the Branch dealing with child sexual abuse, the latest being the October 1 2012 letter I referred to in paragraph 2.5.

3.3. The current elders' book "Shepherd the Flock of God in your Care" also deals with child sexual abuse. The previous book "Pay Attention to Yourselves and to All the Flock" gave guidance on handling cases of serious wrongdoing which included cases of child sexual abuse.

3.4. I personally review the information in this publication and letter, and the information in relevant Watchtower and Awake articles, if ever I have any concern about possible child sexual abuse in the congregation.

4. **A summary of your experience, both prior to and since the allegations made by** **REDACTED** in 1991, of responding to allegations of child sexual abuse within the Church.

4.1. The case involving is the only one concerning child sexual abuse in which I have been involved.

5. **The response of the** **Congregation to allegations of child sexual abuse made in or around 2012 or 2013 by** **in relation to William (Bill Neill), with specific reference to:**

- a. **when, and in what circumstances, you became aware of the alleged abuse;**
- b. **any correspondence, including the substance of that correspondence, that you, alone and/or together with any other member of the** **Congregation, had with the Legal and/or Service Departments of Watchtower Australia after you became aware of the alleged abuse;**
- c. **any discussion(s) or meeting(s) that you, alone and/or together with any other member of the** **Congregation, were involved in, including the substance of those discussions or meetings, with any person about the alleged abuse, including but not limited to any discussions or meetings with:**

i)

ii)

iii) **Robert Boardman;**

iv) **David Wood.**

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- d. Any correspondence, including the substance of that correspondence, that you, alone and/or together with any other member of the [REDACTED] Congregation, had with any other Jehovah's Witness Congregation and/or the Watchtower Australia relating to the allegation of child sexual abuse made by [BCB]
- 5.1. Sometime in 2012, I can't remember the exact date, [BCB] asked the elders to visit her to discuss an issue. I and David Wood visited her and her husband [BCC] at her home.
- 5.2. In the course of that visit, [BCB] described how when she was a teenager staying at Bill Neill's home in Narrogin, she had been subjected by Bill Neill to sexual abuse on a number of occasions. That abuse involved Bill Neill kissing her on many occasions and putting his tongue in her mouth; touching her breasts through her nightgown, and looking at her when she was taking a shower. Later in her letters, [BCB] alleged that Bill Neill had performed oral sex on her.
- 5.3. When [BCB] initially advised us of this matter she said to David and me words to the effect, "I don't want to do anything about it myself but I feel the society should know so others can be protected."
- 5.4. Following this initial meeting with [BCB] David and I put the details in a letter which we sent to the Branch office.
- 5.5. Over subsequent months [BCB] was very upset and depressed. She said she had difficulties with what she felt were unkind actions toward her and her family by some others in the congregation, and she was having some troubles with the behaviour of her own children. She felt that her depression stemmed from the abuse she had suffered as a child. David Wood and I offered support and shared some scriptural thoughts, and suggested helpful articles from our publications which she and her husband could look over, to help deal with the matter.
- 5.6. Sometime later [BCB]'s mother provided an envelope to me at one of our meetings. It was from [BCB] and had a hand written summary substantially in accordance with what she had disclosed to David and me, which we had sent on to the Branch, with some minor elaboration.



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- 5.7. When I next saw [BCB] at the meeting she gave me another envelope with a printed summary with a little more detail but no explanation other than saying "This is the last one".
- 5.8. At a subsequent meeting I saw [BCB] husband [BCC] and he asked for the envelope to be returned, so I returned the latest printed summary and destroyed the previous hand written summary.
- 5.9. Sometime later David Wood and another elder, Robert Boardman went to visit [BCB] and I understand they sent a letter with an updated summary of [BCB]'s complaint, with more details, to the Branch Office. They showed me the summary they had prepared before sending it so that I could confirm matters from my previous involvement.
- 5.10. Over a period of some months about 4 elders including myself were involved in providing shepherding care and assistance, with many visits to [BCB] and her family. She appeared to be very depressed. I spent many hours with her and [BCC] I felt for her pain and the difficulties the whole family was going through.
- 5.11. During this period, [BCB] husband [BCC] said to me words to the effect, [BCB] has seen a psychiatrist about her depression but she isn't getting better so we are seeking your help."
- 5.12. On one occasion [BCC] and I were having a conversation. We were throwing around ideas about how to help [BCB] move on from the abuse she had suffered as a young teenager. [BCC] said they were considering bringing the matter up with the Royal Commission. I said to [BCC] thinking out loud, "What would that accomplish other than dragging Jehovah's name through the mud? Would it help [BCB] move on from this at all?" He said, "It will achieve a measure of closure for her and possible financial compensation." I said, "I see your point, yes, a measure of closure could help [BCB]"
- 5.13. Almost as soon as I had said it, I realized I should not have made that remark to [BCC] as it might seem to question going to the Royal Commission. I was wrong to say it and I never would want to discourage someone going to the authorities with a complaint of child sexual abuse. This is also against the direction we receive as elders from the Branch.



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5.14. After this conversation we both went to BCC home because he said BCB was very depressed and in need of encouragement and we shared some encouraging Scriptural thoughts and I encouraged BCB to focus on positive thoughts that might help her rise above her depressed feelings.



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