

**Statement to the Royal Commission into
Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse**

Name Peter Hollingworth
Address Known to the Royal Commission
Occupation Retired
Date 12 January 2016

1. The handling of the complaint against John Elliot is a matter that I have thought much about over the 22 years since it was brought to my attention. At the stage the complaint against John Elliot was made to me, I believe I had only met Elliot once on a pastoral visit to his previous parish. He was only known to me because of his position as Rector of Dalby but to, my knowledge, I had never been in any other personal contact with him.
2. The matter was referred to me by Bishop Noble because he felt unable to deal with the issues due to his close involvement with both **RED** and Elliot families.
3. I believe this was the first matter during my time of ministry in the Church that involved me dealing directly with an offender alleged to have committed child sexual abuse.
4. On reflection, there were a number of matters on which I was seriously mistaken. I thought it was possible to introduce a process that could engage all parties in dealing with the matter. This included the victim, his family, Elliot and his family and – indirectly – the parish of Dalby where Elliot had recently been appointed the parish priest.
5. In hindsight, this approach led to a set of misguided actions, which were shaped by a number of considerations. These were:
 - a) The amount of time that had passed since the reported abuse (some 12 years), and that it had occurred prior to Elliot's ordination as a priest in 1987.
 - b) That I believed there was no further repetition of abuse since Elliot's ordination.
 - c) That Elliot agreed to:

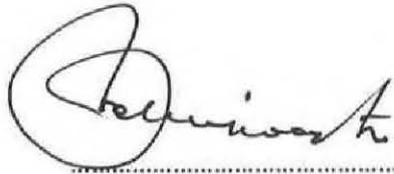
- i. Visit and immediately confess to the victim's family, enabling them to decide whether they wanted to report the matter to the Police.
 - ii. Confess the sexual abuse to his wife.
 - iii. Seek psychiatric treatment from the psychiatrist, with whom I had consulted and was regularly used by the Diocese.
 - d) I had consulted with the Regional Bishops of the Diocese, who did not object to a course of action that would allow Elliot to remain in the parish, subject to various conditions.
 - e) The conditions of Elliot's continued ministry were:
 - i. That Elliot correspond with me regularly;
 - ii. That he agree not to have, establish or be involved with any CEBS Group;
 - iii. Not to have any contact with young boys, unless in the presence of an adult, preferably his wife;
 - iv. That Elliot retired from the parish when he turned 65 years of age.
6. I outline these considerations, not in any way as a justification, but simply to be transparent about my thinking at the time and the process I engaged in. However, I recognise that my approach was wrong and a serious error of judgment.
7. My primary focus and approach should have been on the person who was the victim of the abuse.
8. I accept that the victim and his family were right in stating subsequently that I should not have countenanced any notion of a so-called 'balancing process'.
9. The action I should have taken was to immediately remove Elliot from the ministry.
10. The balancing of the interests of the parish, the victims and the offender was not one that I, or anyone in the Church, should have contemplated.

11. I sincerely apologise to the **RE** family for my handling of Elliot's abuse, and the hurt and pain they experienced as a result.
12. The decision to allow Elliot to remain in his position must have exacerbated the **RED** family's existing distress.
13. I also want to apologise to the victim for the way my correspondence with the Board of Inquiry focused on whether or not the abuse was 'protracted'. It deflected the focus away from the issue of the sexual abuse by Elliot.
14. I now fully understand and accept that the extent and duration of any abuse is not to be regarded as a matter of degree.
15. With regard to the nature and extent of my involvement in the Board of Inquiry into past handling of complaints of sexual abuse in the Anglican Church Diocese of Brisbane, as it related to John Elliot:
 - a) Prior to the announcement of the Board of Inquiry, I had a meeting with Archbishop Aspinall in Brisbane on February 21 2002. I told him that I fully supported his proposed Inquiry into the Church's response to complaints of child sex abuse.
 - b) I had no role in, nor did I advise on, the terms of reference, structure or composition of the Board of Inquiry, as this was a matter for him as the Archbishop of Brisbane and the Diocesan Council to determine.
 - c) Archbishop Aspinall announced a Board of Inquiry into the Past Handling of Complaints of Sexual Abuse in the Anglican Church Diocese of Brisbane, to be conducted by Mr Peter O'Callaghan QC – Board Chair and Professor Freda Briggs – Board Member.
 - d) In all aspects, I sought to fully cooperate with the Board of Inquiry.
 - e) In my case, the Board carried out its Inquiry by correspondence in the form of questions and answers put to me in writing. I sought to respond promptly and to the best of my memory.

16. My response to the Report of the Board of Inquiry:

- a) I accept the Board of Inquiry conclusion that my handling of the complaint in respect of John Elliot was not 'fair, reasonable and appropriate'.
- b) I accept the description set out in the Board of Inquiry Report of the actions that I took after I became aware of allegations against Elliot.
- c) As determined by the Board of Inquiry, I agree that I should not have allowed Elliot to remain in the parish.
- d) By the time the Report was handed down and tabled in the Parliament of Queensland on 23 April 2003, I was no longer in any formal role within the Church, and not in a position to take formal actions based on the Report.
- e) Following the release of the Report on April 23 2003, I made a public apology that acknowledged the findings of the Board of Inquiry Report, in particular for my handling of the Elliot case.
- f) I was subsequently informed that the Church was in the process of settling the matter with the victim. I was not involved in the settlement and have no knowledge of the terms of the settlement.
- g) I also understand that, following the Board of Inquiry Report, the Diocese of Brisbane, along with all other Dioceses in the Anglican Church of Australia, were proceeding with amendments to existing Canon Law. This included passing new legislation in The General Synod and Diocesan Synods, and developing better protocols for dealing with future claims of sexual abuse. As a retired Bishop, I was not directly involved and I accepted the new protocols and processes, as they replaced former practices that I, and others, had previously put in place in Brisbane.

17. This has been a deeply distressing experience for all concerned, and for that I am truly sorry. It has highlighted how a lack of clear guidelines and defined processes can lead to much further hurt for those who have been abused and their families.



Signed:

12. 1. 2016

Date:



Witness:

12. 1. 2016

Date: