Introduction

1. This is the Royal Commission’s 57th public hearing. Its scope and purpose is to consider:

   a. The nature of child sexual abuse and related matters in institutional contexts in Australia and how community understanding of abuse has changed over time.

   b. The extent of child sexual abuse in institutional contexts historically and in contemporary Australia, and challenges to identification and prevention.
c. The factors that contribute to the risk of child sexual abuse in institutional contexts:

   i. factors that make all children vulnerable to sexual abuse and heighten the vulnerability of particular groups of children to sexual abuse

   ii. factors that may contribute to people sexually abusing children in institutional contexts

   iii. institution specific factors that may contribute to child sexual abuse.

d. The impacts of child sexual abuse and institutional responses on survivors, both in childhood and throughout their adult lives, their families and supporters, and the wider community.

e. Any related matters.

2. The Royal Commission is directed to inquire into what institutions and governments should do to better to protect children against child sexual abuse and related matters in institutional contexts in the future.

3. In order to carry out this task, the Royal Commission needs to understand the sexual abuse experienced by children in institutional contexts and the reasons why it has occurred. Understanding the problem is essential to
identifying and preventing abuse in the future, enabling appropriate support for those affected, and properly responding to those who commit, facilitate or conceal abuse.

4. The Royal Commission’s understanding of child sexual abuse in institutional contexts and its impacts is formed by the information gathered from survivors, advocates, experts and service providers. This has been obtained from private sessions, research and public hearings such as this one.

5. This hearing will inform the Royal Commission’s final report and recommendations. It will also seek to increase understanding by the wider Australian community of these issues.

Private session information overview

6. As at 31 December 2016, the Royal Commission had heard from 5,705 people in private sessions. By the end of the inquiry, the Royal Commission anticipates it will have held more than 8,000 private sessions.

7. People who attend a private session have the opportunity to tell Commissioners about their experience of child sexual abuse in institutional contexts. As well as speaking about their abuse, the institution, the perpetrator and the institutional response, private session
attendees often describe their experience of disclosure and the impacts of abuse.

8. It is likely that there are very many people who have been sexually abused in institutional contexts as children who have not attended a private session.

Gender

9. Of survivors who attended private sessions the majority, that is 64 per cent, were male. Thirty six per cent were female. However, research and prevalence studies have shown that girls comprise a higher proportion of victims of child sexual abuse when considering non-institutional settings.

10. More male survivors in private sessions described being victims of other children’s harmful sexual behaviours than female survivors.

11. The gender breakdown of survivors who attended private sessions varied depending on the management of the institution in which they told the Commissioners abuse occurred. Of survivors who said they were abused in an institution managed by a government organisation, 55 per cent were male.

12. Of survivors who said they were abused in an institution managed by secular organisations, 66 per cent were male.
13. 70 per cent of survivors reporting abuse in religious institutions in private sessions were male.

14. The proportion of male and female survivors in private sessions varied according to the type of institution where the abuse was said to have taken place. The Royal Commission heard from more female survivors than male who were sexually abused in childcare and health settings. The Royal Commission heard from more male survivors than female who were sexually abused in places of worship, out of home care, social support services, juvenile justice and detention, educational, recreation, sports and clubs, armed forces and youth employment settings.

15. The proportion of male and female survivors varied over time. 65 per cent of survivors who told the Royal Commission they were abused before 1990 were male – 35% were female. Of those survivors who reported abuse post 1990, 56% were male and 44% female.

**Victim age**

16. The most common age range of victims when they experienced the first episode of abuse was between ten and 14 years old. Forty six per cent of victims were in this age range.
17. Twenty eight per cent were abused when they were between five and nine years.

18. Ten per cent of survivors were abused when they were between the ages of 15 and 17 years.

19. Five per cent of survivors were abused when they were under five years of age.

20. These numbers are consistent with other research about child sexual abuse in institutional settings.

21. Female victims tended to report that the abuse commenced at a younger age than male victims.

**Adult perpetrators**

22. The majority of perpetrators reported were adult males, that is nearly 94 per cent of survivors reported abuse by a male perpetrator. Just under eleven per cent reported abuse by female perpetrators. Seven per cent reported abuse by both male and female perpetrators.

23. The people who were reported during private sessions as having sexually abused children had different ages, ethnicities and socio-economic status. Some were married or in relationships, while others were not.
24. The Royal Commission heard that most adults who sexually abuse a child in an institutional context already have close contact with their victim prior to the abuse.

25. The positions held by adult perpetrators within institutions most commonly reported were members of the clergy, that is 32 per cent, teachers, that is 21 per cent and residential care workers, that is 13 per cent.

People who sexually abuse children

26. During private sessions, the Royal Commission gathered a significant amount of information about the people who the Commissioners were told have sexually abused children in institutional contexts. This included information on both adult perpetrators and children with harmful sexual behaviours.

27. The Royal Commission uses the term children with harmful sexual behaviours to describe people under the age of 18 who sexually harm other children in institutional contexts. This term is used to distinguish them from adult perpetrators of child sexual abuse in institutional contexts. This is because the level of sexual and emotional development, and criminal responsibility of children with harmful sexual behaviours is considered to be different from adults. While a criminal justice response
is appropriate for adult perpetrators, children below the age of 10 are not legally responsible for their actions in Australian jurisdictions. Children aged between 10 and 14 years of age must have their legal responsibility determined in a court of law.

28. Of all survivors who attended a private session, 16 per cent reported that another child had sexually abused them.

29. In most cases reported to Commissioners in private sessions, the victims of children with harmful sexual behaviours were male, that is 62 per cent. Forty five per cent of survivors reported experiencing abuse by children with harmful sexual behaviours in a historical out-of-home care institution. Eighteen per cent reported the abuse occurring in educational settings, and eleven per cent reported the abuse in juvenile justice settings.

Duration, frequency of abuse, and number of perpetrators

30. Not all people who attended private sessions shared information about the duration of the abuse they experienced. Of those who did, 37 per cent reported episodes of abuse that lasted for longer than one year. Two per cent of survivors said they experienced abuse that lasted longer than 10 years.
31. Just under 80 per cent of survivors reported multiple episodes of abuse. The majority of survivors, 78 per cent experienced abuse in a single institution. Sixteen per cent told the Commissioners that they were abused in two institutions, and six per cent said they were abused in three or more institutions.

32. Most survivors told the Commissioners they experienced abuse by a single perpetrator, 64 per cent. Thirty six per cent of survivors told the Commissioners in private sessions that they had been abused by multiple perpetrators.

Types of institutions

33. The institution types most commonly reported to the Royal Commission were managed by religious organisations. These institutions accounted for 60 per cent of all reports by survivors in private sessions. Survivors reported over 1,500 institutions managed by religious organisations, which was equivalent to just over half, 53 per cent of all institutions named in private sessions.

34. More than 2000 of all private session attendees reported sexual abuse in a Catholic institution. At present that is over 37% of attendees at private sessions. That percentage has varied over time. The other denominations commonly reported by survivors were institutions managed by the
Anglican Church, which was reported by 500 survivors in over 200 institutions, and the Salvation Army which was the subject of report by more than 250 survivors in approximately 50 institutions.

35. Just over one third of survivors, that is 35 per cent reported during private sessions that they were abused in an institution under government management. The Commissioners were told about more than 900 government institutions, totalling 32 per cent of institutions named in private sessions.

36. Ten per cent of survivors reported that they were abused in institutions under secular management. The Commissioners were told about more than 400 secular institutions, totalling 14 per cent of institutions.

37. Institutions which were reported, provided a wide range of services or activities. In private sessions, survivors most commonly reported institutions that provided historical out-of-home care (39 per cent), education (32 per cent), and religious instruction or association with places of worship (15 per cent).

38. Patterns of abuse in institutions have changed over time. Some institution types reported during private sessions are no longer a feature of children’s lives in contemporary Australia. For example, orphanages, missions, children’s homes, reformatories and industrial schools do not
exist today. Children’s engagement with other institution types has also
cANGED across different periods. Children are now required to attend
more years at school, more children are involved in sport and recreational
activities, and the number of children in childcare has increased.

Impacts

39. When a child is sexually abused, the effects can be devastating. For some,
the impacts of the abuse, and an institution’s response to it, last for their
whole lives. For many survivors, the impacts of child sexual abuse are
profound and interconnected. They may be experienced at the same time
or consecutively, as a cascade of effects over a lifetime. Some impacts
emerge later in life; others abate only to re-emerge or manifest in
response to triggers or events. Some people experience deep, complex
trauma, which pervades all aspects of their life. Others do not perceive
themselves to be profoundly harmed by the experience.

40. Child sexual abuse can affect all aspects of a person’s life, including how
they develop as a child, adolescent and adult, and their ongoing mental,
physical and emotional health. It can also profoundly affect interpersonal
relationships, cultural identity, spirituality, and social and economic
wellbeing. Although many of the impacts are similar, there may also be
distinct additional impacts when a child is sexually abused in an institutional context.

41. How an institution responds to child sexual abuse can also have a significant impact on a victim, and can compound the effects of abuse, increasing the feeling of betrayal. A poor institutional response can enable the abuse to continue, as well as contributing to re-traumatisation, fear and mistrust of institutions, isolation and ostracism. Conversely, appropriate responses can help victims move towards recovery and healing.

42. Child sexual abuse affects the whole community. The effects ripple outwards, adversely affecting victims’ parents, siblings, partners, carers and children, as well as other children and staff in institutions where the abuse occurred. The effects can be intergenerational, with multiple generations being affected by child sexual abuse.

Structure of the hearing

43. This hearing will consist of eleven panels comprising expert witnesses including academics, practitioners, advocates and survivors.

44. Three expert witnesses will be appearing by video link. The Royal Commission is very grateful to them for participating in this hearing,
despite the time differences that mean they are contributing late at night or early in the morning.

45. Today will provide an overview of why and how child sexual abuse occurs in institutions. What is known about children with harmful sexual behaviours will also be explored. This panel includes international experts from the United States and Canada, as well as academic and advocacy group experts from Australia.

46. Day two will focus first, on the strategies and methods used to target children as well as approaches to prevention, risk management and treatment for perpetrators and children with harmful sexual behaviours.

47. The next panel of witnesses will look at institutional and community factors that enable or facilitate child sexual abuse to occur and continue undetected or without adequate responses, including ‘closed’ institutional environments and out-of-home care.

48. On day three, panellists will look at grooming and entrapment. This session will include evidence from survivor witnesses who will share their experiences of grooming. The next group of panellists will give evidence about what can influence the vulnerability of children to child sexual abuse in institutional contexts.
49. On day four panellists will consider the impact of child sexual abuse in institutional contexts on survivors and others. In the first session, the members of the panel will give an overview of the complex and interrelated impacts of child sexual abuse. The following group of panellists will look at the mental health impacts of child sexual abuse, including suicidality. There will be survivor witness who will share her experience of how child sexual abuse has affected her. This will be followed by a panel of witnesses who will look at the impacts experienced during childhood, adulthood, and later in life. Two survivors will give evidence about their experiences of the impacts of child sexual abuse at different stages during their lives.

50. On the final day, the ripple effect of child sexual abuse and how the impacts of child sexual abuse go beyond the survivor to affect others, including families, carers and supporters, and the wider community will be considered. The Commissioners will hear from a survivor witness, who will share her experience of the impact on her of her mother’s sexual abuse as a child. The witnesses in the following session will focus on the resilience and strength of survivors, and share what is known about how victims and survivors can be supported the start the journey towards healing.
51. The final session comprises a panel of seven survivors who will present their vision for children in Australia today and in the future, and what they would like to see change as a result of the Royal Commission.

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