

31st July 2003



SENATE COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO CHILDREN IN INSTITUTIONAL CARE

Please find below my brief submission:

An inquiry into the treatment of children in institutional care must be broad and far reaching. A Royal Commission or any other form of public national inquiry which is able to investigate the entire spectrum of abuse of children in institutions is an essential first step if this issue is to be adequately addressed. Anything less will, once again, be a "band-aid" job.

Only a very public Commission will afford an opportunity for all victims to come forward and relate their unfortunate childhood incidents. Some victims may still choose not to come forward. At least they would have been afforded the opportunity. Presently they have the option of either appealing to the very institution which was responsible for their care and at the same time directly or vicariously responsible for their abuse, or alternatively to commence an expensive and lengthy legal battle against rich and resourceful institutions. The latter working against victims further considering the statute of limitations and loss of forensic evidence to prove their claims.

It is an indisputable fact that the very young, some as young as five, were terrorised. They were terrorised by people whom they and their parents trusted. Trust based on the representation by most of these institutions that they were the workers of God and paragons of virtue.

There is a large population of Australian citizens who lost their childhood and innocence in an act of terror. They have had to live with the consequences in silence. Many still suffer and all of them were as innocent as the occupants of the World Trade Centre on 11 September 2001 or the Sari Club in Bali on the night of 12 October 2001.

That there is not as much outrage is solely explicable by the fact that not many people are aware of the serious nature or the magnitude of this crime. The only way it will be revealed is through a Royal Commission or equivalent. That Royal Commission's terms of reference must include the power to recommend compensation for each victim. Anything short of that will be injustice compounded.

For those who doubt the wisdom of a Royal Commission on costs or other grounds, I suggest they need only imagine their own child being woken up by a person in the best institution chosen by them for that child, and sexually abused. Imagine the tears on that child, the terror in their eyes, the muffled screams and the physical injury. For those who are still not persuaded – imagine this again and again, year after year. Then turn around and try to argue that cost is a relevant consideration in dealing with terrorists.

I write this on behalf of my brother.

Yours sincerely