

Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Implementation of the National Redress Scheme 2026 1

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**Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Implementation
of the National Redress Scheme: *Inquiry into the Continuing
Operation of the National Redress Scheme (NRS)***

January 18th, 2026

Author Consents to Publication

Executive summary

I support continuing the National Redress Scheme beyond its current sunset settings. A time-limited scheme is fundamentally mismatched with how trauma and disclosure actually work: many survivors do not disclose or seek help until years, even decades, after abuse. *The Royal Commission* reported an average time to first disclosure of 23.9 years based on private session information¹.

The Committee's Terms of Reference specifically ask about extending the Scheme's operational timeline, resolving outstanding case management and determinations, planning for a surge as the Scheme approaches conclusion, and ensuring access to justice for vulnerable cohorts including prisoners². I address each of these issues and make practical recommendations to improve fairness and accessibility while protecting survivor wellbeing.

My submission also includes a broader observation: Australia has already recognised, in law reform across jurisdictions, that child abuse claims should not be barred by time. For example, Queensland removed limitation periods for actions relating to child abuse³. Yet adults subjected to serious institutional violence and sexual assault can still face strict limitation periods (for personal injury, generally three years in Queensland)⁴.

As someone who has experienced sexual and physical assault in prison as an adult, I know first-hand that trauma can prevent a person from reporting or commencing any claim within short timeframes. This is relevant to the Committee's work because the Terms of Reference expressly include prisoners as a cohort of survivors, and because survivors' trust in redress systems is shaped by whether they experience justice as timely and humane, not procedural and exclusionary.

About the author and basis of submission

I am a graduate of law and community advocate based in Far North Queensland. I have lived experience of incarceration. Across time in custody and in the community, I have spent significant time with people who have been victim-survivors of institutional abuse and violence, and I have seen the long-term impacts on health, relationships, education, employment, housing and contact with the criminal justice system.

I make this submission openly and am willing for it to be published, including the parts that refer to my own adult trauma in prison. I do this because many people who are harmed in institutions feel invisible and are reluctant to speak. Survivors deserve systems that meet them where they are, when they are ready.

¹ Australia. Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. (2017). *Final report*. <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-571561518>.

² *Australian Parliament House inquiry page (Terms of Reference)* - Joint Standing Committee on Implementation of the National Redress Scheme, Inquiry into the continuing operation of the NRS.

³ *Queensland Limitation of Actions Act* (1974), s 11A

⁴ *ibid* s 11

Context: Scheme conclusion settings and current risks

Current public information states that applications for redress close on 30 June 2027 and the Scheme is scheduled to end on 30 June 2028⁵. These dates create two major risks:

- A foreseeable exclusion risk: survivors who disclose late, or who only become safe enough to engage later in life, are shut out by a hard date (even where the abuse occurred decades earlier).
- A foreseeable backlog risk: the closer the closing date gets, the more likely there is to be a surge in applications and requests for support, at the same time as resources are winding down unless a transition plan is funded. The Committee has asked directly about planning for a possible increase in applications⁶.

Recent public reporting has highlighted concerns about delays and backlogs and the possibility that survivors may miss out as time runs out⁷. These concerns should be treated as system design problems, not survivor problems.

Delayed disclosure is normal - the Scheme must reflect this

Survivors often delay disclosure because of trauma responses, shame, self-blame, grooming dynamics, fear of retaliation, fear of not being believed, ongoing dependence on the institution or perpetrator, cultural pressures, and lack of access to safe supports. The Royal Commission reported an average time to first disclosure of 23.9 years⁸. Some policy documents also note that a majority of victim-survivors first disclose in adulthood⁹.

A redress system that closes on a fixed date will inevitably exclude people who are harmed but not ready. This is not theoretical. In every community there are people in their 40s, 50s, 60s and older who are only now seeking counselling, only now speaking to family, only now being able to face paperwork and interviews. A scheme that ends because a calendar date arrives sends an unacceptable message: 'You took too long to heal.'

Recommendations on the Scheme's operational timeline

I recommend that governments agree to extend the Scheme's operational timeline and avoid a hard stop that cuts off late-disclosing survivors¹⁰. If a full extension cannot be achieved immediately, I recommend at minimum:

⁵ Australian Government, *National Redress Scheme - time limits*

⁶ Australian Parliament House inquiry page (*Terms of Reference*) - Joint Standing Committee on Implementation of the National Redress Scheme, Inquiry into the continuing operation of the NRS.

⁷ *The Guardian*, 27 Nov 2024 - reporting on delays/backlog and risk of survivors missing out as time runs out. <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2024/nov/27/dangerous-crunch-point-abuse-survivors-risk-being-denied-justice-due-to-delays-in-australias-redress-scheme>

⁸ Australia. Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. (2017). *Final report*. <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-571561518>.

⁹ Tasmanian Government, *'Towards Healing'* https://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0005/375287/Towards_Healing_-_Tasmanian_Government_Response_and_Action_Plan.pdf

¹⁰ Australian Parliament House inquiry page (*Terms of Reference*) - Joint Standing Committee on Implementation of the National Redress Scheme, Inquiry into the continuing operation of the NRS.

- ☐ Legislate and communicate an extension to the application closing date (beyond 30 June 2027), and align funding accordingly.
- ☐ Guarantee that all applications lodged before any revised closing date will be determined, even if determinations occur after the nominal end date.
- ☐ Create a clear and survivor-friendly process for late applications where the person can demonstrate trauma-related barriers to earlier engagement.
- ☐ Publish a transition plan that shows how survivor supports, legal assistance and case management will operate through any extended period.

Backlog reduction and case management: prioritise without harming survivors

I support measures that increase throughput, but not at the cost of procedural fairness or survivor wellbeing. A backlog is itself a form of harm. The Scheme should publish measurable service standards (and meet them), including:

- ☐ Clear timeframes for each stage (intake, evidence gathering, assessment, determination, review) with public reporting.
- ☐ Trauma-informed contact protocols: limit repeated retelling, offer a single consistent case manager where possible, and provide options for written or supported verbal statements.
- ☐ A triage system that prioritises terminally ill and elderly survivors, and survivors at acute risk.
- ☐ Better coordination with legal and support services so evidence gathering does not stall.

Where institutions delay in providing information, there should be consequences. A survivor should not 'run out the clock' because an institution or agency fails to respond. Institutional responsiveness should be monitored and enforced as part of Scheme governance.

Planning for a surge as the Scheme approaches conclusion

The Terms of Reference ask about planning for an increase in applications as the Scheme approaches conclusion¹¹. Planning for a surge should not be optional; it should be treated as a predictable demand curve. Recommended actions include:

- ☐ A funded surge workforce plan that ramps staffing up (not down) in the final years, including trained case managers and trauma-informed assessors.
- ☐ A national awareness campaign that is repeated and targeted - including culturally safe outreach to First Nations communities, CALD communities, and regional/remote areas.
- ☐ Partnerships with prisons, parole services, homelessness services, community legal centres, and health services to identify and support survivors.
- ☐ Simple, accessible application pathways (including assisted digital, phone, paper, and in-person support).

¹¹ *Australian Parliament House inquiry page (Terms of Reference)* - Joint Standing Committee on Implementation of the National Redress Scheme, Inquiry into the continuing operation of the NRS.

Access for vulnerable cohorts including prisoners

I strongly support the Committee's explicit focus on vulnerable cohorts, including prisoners¹². People in custody often have higher rates of trauma, lower trust in institutions, lower literacy, and significant barriers to accessing records, identification, phones and stable addresses. These barriers are solvable if the Scheme designs for them.

Recommendations for prisoner access include:

- ☐ A dedicated custodial access pathway: trained prison-based liaison officers (independent of corrective services) who can provide information and help complete applications.
- ☐ Confidential legal and counselling access to support applications, including via legal aid, community legal centres and specialist services.
- ☐ Trauma-informed protections so survivors are not forced to disclose details in unsafe settings or to staff who may be connected to prior harm.
- ☐ Procedures for obtaining records when a person is in custody or has unstable housing, including proactive record searches where the survivor identifies an institution.

My lived experience in prison included sexual and physical assault as an adult. By the time I was safe enough and well enough to consider reporting and pursuing any form of claim, the relevant limitation period had passed. This is not about seeking to expand the NRS beyond its child abuse scope; it is about recognising how trauma interacts with time limits for people in institutions - and ensuring that the NRS does not replicate the same injustice by closing to child abuse survivors who disclose late.

Broader observation: limitation periods, defamation time limits and the reality of trauma

While the NRS is focused on child sexual abuse in institutional contexts, the policy logic is relevant to how the law treats trauma generally. Queensland has removed limitation periods for actions relating to child abuse (reflecting the reality of delayed disclosure)¹³. However, other trauma-related claims remain time-limited. In Queensland, actions for personal injury are generally subject to a three-year limitation period¹⁴. Defamation actions are generally subject to a one-year limitation period from publication (with limited extension mechanisms)¹⁵.

I raise these points because the Committee is examining how the NRS should operate and whether time-based cutoffs are appropriate. My experience, and the experience of many survivors I have met, is that trauma can silence people for years. Systems that require action within short time windows often privilege those with resources, stability and immediate access to support - and exclude the people who are most harmed.

¹² *Australian Parliament House inquiry page (Terms of Reference)* - Joint Standing Committee on Implementation of the National Redress Scheme, Inquiry into the continuing operation of the NRS.

¹³ *Queensland Limitation of Actions Act* (1974), s 11A

¹⁴ *ibid* s 11

¹⁵ *ibid* s 10AA

Spent convictions reform and digital permanence

I have advocated for spent convictions reform to account for the digital age, where old material remains searchable and continues to affect employment and education opportunities long after the law regards a conviction as spent. Under Queensland law, rehabilitation periods are commonly 5 years (Magistrates Court convictions) or 10 years (District/Supreme Court convictions) before non-disclosure protections apply, subject to exceptions¹⁶.

For survivors, digital permanence can compound harm. Inappropriate online material, adverse media coverage and persistent institutional records can keep trauma alive, limit opportunities, and deter people from engaging with justice processes. A redress system should not assume that time alone heals, or that people can simply 'move on'. The NRS should therefore build in strong privacy protections, survivor control over publication, and coordinated support for survivors navigating ongoing reputational and psychological impacts.

Rob Pyne's support for redress reform

Queensland has a recent example of cross-party attention to the fairness issues faced by survivors. Former Cairns MP Rob Pyne introduced and advocated for reforms relating to institutional child abuse and survivors' access to justice, including through the Civil Liability (Institutional Child Abuse) Amendment Bill 2017. The Queensland Parliament inquiry page for that Bill provides a public record, including links to the Bill and Mr Pyne's introductory speech¹⁷.

This is relevant because it shows that elected representatives - including those from regional Queensland - have recognised that survivors require law reform that is bold, fair and practical. The Commonwealth should apply the same principles to ensuring the NRS remains open long enough to reach late-disclosing survivors.

Conclusion

The National Redress Scheme exists because Australia recognised that institutional child sexual abuse caused deep and lifelong harm and that many survivors were failed by existing systems. A scheme that ends on a fixed date risks repeating that failure by excluding survivors who are not yet ready to disclose. The Royal Commission's finding on delayed disclosure makes this risk predictable, not hypothetical¹⁸.

I urge the Committee to recommend that the Scheme be extended, that governments fund a realistic surge and backlog reduction plan, and that access be improved for vulnerable cohorts including prisoners¹⁹. Survivors deserve a redress system that is patient, trauma-informed, and open for as long as survivors need it.

¹⁶ *Queensland Criminal Law (Rehabilitation of Offenders) Act* (1986)

¹⁷ *Queensland Parliament, inquiry page for Civil Liability (Institutional Child Abuse) Amendment Bill* (2017)

¹⁸ Australia. Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. (2017). *Final report*. <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-571561518>.

¹⁹ *Australian Parliament House inquiry page (Terms of Reference)* - Joint Standing Committee on Implementation of the National Redress Scheme, Inquiry into the continuing operation of the NRS.

