Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry

Inquiry into the Continuing Operation of the National Redress Scheme

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Table of Contents

Introduction and Author Context

I am a survivor of institutional child sexual abuse that occurred during my primary school years within a religious institution. I first sought justice through the court system in the 1990s and have since spent more than three decades navigating the legal, institutional, and psychological consequences of that abuse.

My engagement with the National Redress Scheme followed many years of unsuccessful attempts to resolve my case through institutional processes that pre-dated the Scheme. While the Scheme represented an important acknowledgment of institutional failure, my experience of engaging with it was prolonged, complex, and emotionally demanding. I completed my engagement with the Scheme, including the Direct Personal Response process, in February 2025.

This submission is made in my personal capacity as a survivor.

Over several years, I have engaged with the Department of Social Services regarding the National Redress Scheme, both directly and through correspondence and advocacy with my federal parliamentary representatives. This engagement occurred during my participation in the Scheme and has continued since its conclusion in my case.

Through these interactions, I have provided the Department with information, feedback, and observations on survivor experiences, systemic barriers, and areas for reform. Much of that material is reflected in this submission. The views expressed here are grounded in my lived experience of the Scheme, my long-term engagement with redress and justice processes, and my ongoing efforts to contribute constructively to improving outcomes for survivors.

My intent in making this submission is to support the integrity of the Scheme as it approaches its conclusion by identifying risks, gaps, and practical reforms that can help ensure survivors are treated fairly, with dignity, and in a manner consistent with the Scheme's original purpose.

Overview of Survivor Perspective and Systemic Lens

This submission reflects a dual lens:

- **Survivor lived experience**, including prolonged exposure to institutional processes, legal intermediaries, and delayed justice.
- **Systemic observation**, informed by Scheme data, patterns across survivor cohorts, and emerging risks as the Scheme approaches its conclusion.

My intent is not to undermine the Scheme, but to support its integrity by identifying risks, gaps, and practical reforms to ensure that survivors are treated fairly and with dignity in the final phase of its operation.

Term of Reference 1

The Scheme's Operational Timeline and the Potential for Extension

Based on my lived experience and a review of official Scheme data published by the National Redress Scheme, I hold a strong view that the Scheme cannot deliver just or complete outcomes for survivors within its current operational timeframe without substantial additional investment and rectification of systemic process failures

As at 31 December 2025, there were 72,855 applications lodged with the Scheme, with 43,536 applications remaining unresolved, including 29,053 assessed as actionable. Over the preceding six months, the Scheme continued to receive an average of 1,480 new applications per month, reflecting sustained and historically high intake

These figures alone indicate that, under current resourcing and completion rates, the Scheme is unlikely to resolve its existing caseload before its proposed conclusion.

Many unresolved applications involve complex survivor histories, including prior legal proceedings, engagement with historical institutional processes, and survivors from vulnerable cohorts who require additional time, stability, and support to engage safely.

Beyond application volume, the Scheme's own data highlights a deeper structural issue in the administration and sequencing of the Direct Personal Response (DPR) process.

According to the National Redress Scheme Newsletter (January 2026), for the month of December:

- 50% of survivors accepted a DPR as part of their redress offer,
- Only 7 survivors completed a DPR, and
- Only 3 survivors made contact with institutions to commence the DPR process

These figures do not merely reflect low uptake; they reveal failures in process design, communication, and timing.

In practice, once survivors receive a financial payment, many understandably feel that the process is "complete" and have little appetite to re-engage with institutions. This is not because DPR lacks value, but because the positive outcomes that can be achieved through a well-supported DPR have not been clearly demonstrated to applicants in advance. As a result, survivors are asked to make decisions about DPR without adequate understanding of what it can realistically deliver, or without confidence that the process will be safe, supported, and meaningful.

It is also important to clarify that under current settings, applicants must commence a Direct Personal Response by 30 June 2028. From my perspective, this limitation is inappropriate and inconsistent with trauma-informed practice. Survivors do not heal, disclose, or seek restorative

engagement according to administrative deadlines. Many may only feel ready to pursue a DPR years after receiving financial redress, particularly once stability, safety, or therapeutic support is in place.

Even if the Scheme concludes administratively, survivors should retain the ability to pursue a Direct Personal Response at a later date, should they wish. Without a longer and more flexible timeframe, there is a real risk that survivors will be effectively denied access to the Scheme's restorative component, not by choice, but by process design.

Compounding this issue is my strong concern, based on lived experience, that a significant proportion of the community remains unaware of the existence of the National Redress Scheme. Many survivors continue to live in silence, believing that the only pathways to justice involve court proceedings or adversarial legal action. There is a grave and foreseeable risk that individuals will become aware of the Scheme only after it has concluded. At this point, they may feel denied an opportunity for acknowledgement and repair due to inadequate public communication.

Taken together, unresolved application volumes, sustained intake, poorly sequenced DPR processes, extremely low DPR engagement despite high acceptance, rigid commencement deadlines, and persistent awareness gaps indicate that a just conclusion of the Scheme within its current timeframe is highly unlikely.

From my perspective, an extension of the Scheme's operational timeline, alongside meaningful reform of DPR processes and timeframes, is ethically necessary to ensure that justice is not determined by administrative sequencing or deadlines, but by fairness, readiness, and genuine survivor choice.

Term of Reference 2

Accessibility, Funding, and Transition Plans for Support Services

Support services are foundational to survivor participation in the National Redress Scheme, particularly where applications remain unresolved for extended periods or involve complex personal histories.

Scheme data published by the National Redress Scheme indicates that:

- Thousands of applications remain stalled in information-gathering stages
- More than 6,800 cases are awaiting additional information from applicants
- A significant proportion of applicants identify as belonging to cohorts with higher support needs, including First Nations survivors, people living with disabilities, and care leavers.

From my lived experience, prolonged delays, repeated information requests, and unclear timelines can significantly exacerbate trauma and undermine a survivor's capacity to continue engaging with the process. What may appear administratively minor can, for survivors, trigger

withdrawal, avoidance, or disengagement, not due to lack of entitlement, but due to cumulative emotional strain.

As the Scheme approaches its conclusion, the absence of a clearly articulated and properly funded transition plan for survivor support services presents a serious risk. Survivors whose applications remain unresolved, who are awaiting determinations, or who are navigating review or Direct Personal Response processes may find themselves without adequate therapeutic, advocacy, or practical support at precisely the point of greatest vulnerability.

This risk is compounded by the fact that a substantial proportion of the community remains unaware of the existence of the National Redress Scheme. As outlined under Term of Reference 1, improving awareness is essential to justice and equity. However, increased awareness will almost certainly result in increased demand, including late applications, complex cases, and survivors engaging for the first time after decades of silence.

Without proactive planning, this increased demand will collide with diminishing administrative capacity, creating conditions in which survivors are encouraged to come forward but are insufficiently supported once they do.

In my view, effective transition planning must include:

- Guaranteed continuity of counselling and psychological support for survivors whose engagement with the Scheme extends beyond its administrative conclusion
- Adequately funded advocacy and navigation support to assist survivors stalled in information-gathering or review stages;
- Specialist support for vulnerable cohorts who face additional barriers to engagement;
- Clear communication to survivors about what supports will remain available before, during, and after the scheme closure.

Additionally, targeted funding and forward planning are required to ensure survivors are not abandoned as administrative processes wind down. A survivor-centred Scheme cannot be concluded responsibly unless the support structures surrounding it are sustained long enough to ensure a safe resolution and continuity of care.

Term of Reference 3

Case Management Issues, Information Requests, and Resolution Timeframes

While earlier sections address the scale and structural pressures facing the National Redress Scheme, this section focuses specifically on how the Scheme is administered at the case level, and how current practices affect survivor engagement and outcomes.

From my lived experience, one of the most significant barriers to effective participation in the Scheme is inconsistent and fragmented case management, particularly regarding information requests and communication timeframes.

Scheme data indicates that a substantial proportion of applications remain in the information-gathering stage, with over 6,800 cases awaiting additional information from applicants. While information requests are a necessary part of assessment, the manner in which they are issued, repeated, and followed up can materially affect a survivor's capacity to respond.

Common issues experienced by survivors include:

- Multiple requests for the same or similar information over time
- Long gaps between correspondence, followed by urgent deadlines
- Lack of clarity about what information is genuinely required versus optional
- Changes in case handling that require survivors to retell their story or re-submit material
- Limited visibility of where an application sits in the process or how long a stage is expected to take.

These practices have cumulative effects. For survivors, each request can reopen traumatic material. Repetition and uncertainty can lead to disengagement, not because survivors are unwilling to participate, but because the process becomes psychologically unsustainable.

From a survivor-centred perspective, improving case management does not require lowering assessment standards. It requires:

- Clearer and consolidated information requests
- Realistic, trauma-informed response timeframes
- Continuity of case handling wherever possible
- Transparent communication about process stages and expected timelines.

As the Scheme approaches its conclusion, unresolved case management issues risk compounding harm by increasing pressure on survivors at precisely the point where certainty and stability are most needed. Addressing these issues is essential to maximising just outcomes within any remaining operational period.

Term of Reference 4

Outstanding Applications and Determinations

The scale of outstanding applications and determinations within the National Redress Scheme presents a significant and escalating justice risk, particularly as the Scheme approaches its proposed conclusion.

According to official Scheme data, as at **December 2025**:

- More than 5,700 applications were with an Independent Decision Maker (IDM) for determination; and
- A further 952 applications were being prepared for the delivery of an outcome.

These figures represent survivors who have already navigated validation and information-gathering stages and are awaiting final decisions, often after prolonged engagement with the Scheme.

Of particular concern is the Scheme's own review data. Over the last six months, 28.6% of completed reviews resulted in an increased redress payment.

This rate is deeply troubling.

A review uplift rate of this magnitude suggests that a substantial proportion of initial determinations are materially flawed, incomplete, or insufficiently calibrated to the harm experienced by survivors. This is not a marginal error rate; it indicates a systemic issue in the quality of decision-making.

From a survivor's perspective, the consequences are profound. Requesting a review:

- adds months, and often longer, to an already extended process;
- requires survivors to re-engage with traumatic material; and
- prolongs uncertainty at a point where resolution is critical to well-being.

Importantly, this has downstream effects on survivor engagement with other elements of the Scheme. Survivors who undergo a review, particularly those who ultimately receive a higher payment, may reasonably feel that the initial process failed them. Having endured further delay and emotional cost to secure a fairer outcome, many will have little capacity or willingness to pursue a **Direct Personal Response**, even where that option was originally accepted.

In this way, deficiencies in determination quality do not merely affect financial outcomes; they actively undermine the Scheme's restorative intent and contribute to disengagement from non-financial pathways.

As the Scheme approaches closure, there is a real risk that pressure to finalise large numbers of determinations will prioritise speed over accuracy, further increasing the likelihood of reviews, delays, and survivor harm.

To maximise just outcomes before the Scheme concludes, it is essential that:

- Determination quality is strengthened, not compressed
- Adequate Independent Decision Making and review capacity is maintained or increased
- Decision-making processes are sufficiently robust to minimise the need for survivors to seek correction through review.

Without addressing these issues, the Scheme risks leaving a legacy of unresolved injustice, in which survivors technically receive outcomes only after unnecessary delay, additional harm, and loss of confidence in the process itself.

Term of Reference 5

Planning for a Possible Increase in Applications

Application volumes to the National Redress Scheme have increased dramatically over the life of the Scheme, rising from an average of 357 applications per month in FY2018–19 to over 1,600 applications per month in FY2024–25, with sustained high intake continuing into FY2025–26.

This trend is predictable and should not be viewed as anomalous. As the Scheme approaches its conclusion, increased engagement is driven by a combination of factors, including:

- Late-stage awareness among survivors
- Renewed institutional outreach
- The activity of legal intermediaries and other third parties

While concerns about claim farming are legitimate and should be addressed, it would be both inaccurate and unfair to attribute the rise in applications primarily to this factor. The current surge largely reflects long-standing deficiencies in government-led communication, outreach, and public education regarding the Scheme's existence and purpose.

For much of the Scheme’s operation, awareness has been limited and uneven. This has left a vacuum in which some legal firms and organisations have undertaken their own marketing and outreach. Where such activity is poorly regulated or inadequately trauma-informed, it can raise ethical concerns. However, the underlying cause remains the absence of a consistent, authoritative, and survivor-centred communication strategy led by the government.

It is the responsibility of the Department, and of government more broadly, to ensure that survivors receive accurate information about their options, free from pressure, misrepresentation, or commercial incentive. Addressing claim farming, therefore, requires not only regulatory scrutiny but also a robust, accessible, and well-resourced public information campaign that reaches survivors directly.

Importantly, improving awareness, as justice requires, will almost certainly result in further increases in applications. This outcome should be anticipated and planned for, not treated as an administrative inconvenience.

Effective surge planning must extend beyond raw processing capacity. It must include:

- Sufficient staffing across assessment, determination, and review functions
- Expanded survivor support and navigation services

- Clear, trauma-informed communication strategies
- Realistic timeframes that prioritise accuracy and fairness over throughput

Without a credible surge strategy, increased intake risks compounding existing delays, increasing review rates, and further diminishing survivor confidence in the Scheme at precisely the point where trust and care are most needed.

Term of Reference 6

Access to Justice for Vulnerable Cohorts Following 2024 Changes

While I do not personally identify with all cohorts listed in the Terms of Reference, my lived experience intersects with many survivors who face significant barriers to accessing justice, including those who have:

- Previously engaged in legal processes and been retraumatised or financially depleted
- Been deemed ineligible under technical, historical, or narrowly defined criteria
- Disengaged entirely due to complexity, distress, or lack of capacity to navigate formal systems.

Scheme data demonstrates high representation from groups with elevated support needs, including:

- First Nations survivors,
- People living with disability
- Care leavers

These cohorts often face compounded barriers to engagement, including literacy challenges, health impacts, distrust of institutions, and limited access to consistent advocacy or support. Changes to Scheme access in 2024, therefore, require scrutiny to ensure they have not unintentionally narrowed access to justice for those already at the margins.

It is also important to recognise a broader cohort of survivors who do not formally identify as “vulnerable,” but who have nonetheless remained silent for decades. Many have avoided legal or institutional pathways because they understand the court process to be adversarial, costly, and ill-suited to dealing with institutional abuse. Others lack the financial resources, emotional resilience, or social support required to pursue civil litigation.

For these survivors, the National Redress Scheme may represent the first realistic opportunity for acknowledgement and repair. Ensuring equitable access, therefore, requires not only attention to defined vulnerable cohorts but also recognition of those excluded by the very structure of traditional justice systems.

From an access-to-justice perspective, Scheme settings, eligibility interpretations, and support pathways must not inadvertently privilege survivors who are resourced, informed, or legally represented, while disadvantaging those who are not.

Term of Reference 7

Other Matters Survivors Wish to Make Known

This section addresses several interrelated issues that lie beyond narrow administrative considerations but materially affect survivor safety, trust, and outcomes under the National Redress Scheme.

Claim Farming, Marketing, and Legal Intermediaries

Drawing on my own decades-long experience engaging with legal institutions, I have observed significant variability in professional conduct. Some firms demonstrated structured, care-focused, and trauma-informed approaches. Many did not.

From my perspective, there are clear and observable concerns in the current environment, including:

- Claim farming practices that prioritise volume over survivor readiness or wellbeing
- Marketing strategies that encourage rushed engagement, particularly as the Scheme approaches its conclusion
- Legal intermediaries operating without adequate trauma-informed safeguards or realistic expectation-setting.

These concerns are evident in publicly observable marketing and outreach activities, including social media and online advertising, through which law firms actively solicit contact from survivors. While not all such activity is inappropriate, the absence of consistent standards increases the risk that survivors are encouraged to engage prematurely or without adequate support.

These practices risk compounding harm and undermining trust, not only in the legal profession, but in the scheme itself. This inquiry provides an opportunity to consider whether clearer professional standards, oversight mechanisms, or accreditation frameworks are required to ensure that legal practitioners and intermediaries assisting redress applicants engage in ethical, trauma-informed, and genuinely survivor-centred practice.

Training and Lived-Experience–Informed Practice

One constructive and preventative reform would be the development of specialised training for legal practitioners and support staff working with redress applicants, including lived-experience-led components.

Based on my experience, many practitioners are legally competent but insufficiently equipped to work with survivors of institutional child sexual abuse, particularly those with long histories of trauma, distrust of institutions, or prior negative legal experiences.

Training that incorporates lived-experience perspectives, practical trauma-informed engagement techniques, and survivor-appropriate process design could:

- Improve the quality and consistency of survivor interactions
- Reduce retraumatisation and disengagement
- Raise professional standards across the broader redress ecosystem

Such training could be delivered as a short accredited course, a mandatory induction module, or a voluntary accreditation pathway. Importantly, this approach would support good practice rather than punish poor practice, while helping ensure survivors receive appropriate care regardless of who assists them.

Direct Personal Response (DPR) Conversion Gap and Institutional Responsibility

As outlined earlier in this submission, Scheme data demonstrates a substantial gap between survivors accepting a Direct Personal Response (DPR) and those commencing or completing the process.

This gap should not be interpreted as survivor reluctance or lack of interest. Rather, it reflects systemic barriers, including:

- Lack of clarity about what DPR can realistically deliver
- Insufficient support to navigate the process
- Power imbalances when engaging directly with institutions
- Cumulative emotional toll of prolonged engagement with the Scheme, including reviews and delays.

In practice, once survivors receive a financial payment, many understandably feel that the process is complete and have little capacity to re-engage with institutions, particularly when the benefits of DPR have not been clearly demonstrated in advance.

In my own experience, DPR can be meaningful when appropriately supported and transparently framed. However, current arrangements do not consistently enable this. Institutions, in particular, must be doing more to:

- Engage proactively and in good faith;
- Provide clear, survivor-centred information about the DPR process
- Ensure restorative pathways are supported, timely, and safe.

Without reform, the DPR component risks becoming symbolic rather than restorative, offered in principle, but inaccessible in practice.

Term of Reference 8

Whether DSS Administration Meets Survivor Expectations and Statutory Objectives

The Scheme represents an important acknowledgment of institutional harm. However, my experience highlights a gap between survivor-centred intent and lived reality.

Large unresolved caseloads, prolonged information gathering, weak DPR conversion, and inconsistent case management all challenge the Scheme's statutory objectives as it approaches conclusion.

There remains an opportunity, and responsibility, to address these issues before closure rather than embedding them as legacy failures.

Conclusion

I welcome this inquiry and appreciate the opportunity to contribute at a critical point in the life of the National Redress Scheme.

Based on my lived experience and the Scheme's operational history to date, I do not believe there is a realistic pathway for the Scheme to resolve its outstanding caseload, address systemic weaknesses, and fulfil its restorative intent within its current timeframe.

An extension of the Scheme is necessary. However, extension alone is insufficient. Meaningful planning must occur to ensure that changes and adjustments are implemented thoughtfully, transparently, and with appropriate resourcing.

Critically, this planning must be undertaken with direct input from people with lived experience of the Scheme. Survivors are uniquely placed to identify where processes break down and where reform is most urgently required.

With appropriate extension, planning, and survivor-informed reform, the Scheme can still conclude with integrity. Without these measures, there is a serious risk that survivors will be left unresolved, unheard, or retraumatised, not because of their choices, but because the system ran out of time.