



## AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

### THE PRESIDENT

29 October 2019

Ms Sophie Dunstone  
Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600  
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Dear Ms Dunstone

I am in receipt of your letter to me of 21 October 2019. You have drawn my attention to the submission from Mr Garry Leicester, which reflects adversely on the Catholic Church. In response to the assertions which Mr Leicester makes in the two paragraphs to which my attention has been drawn, my response as President of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference is as follows:

1. I do acknowledge that the internal procedures of the Church in past times have been the subject of quite severe criticism in the various reports of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.
2. In addition to its criticism of the Church's internal procedures, the Royal Commission was also severely critical of the acts or omissions of some Catholic bishops and other Catholic Church leaders in the non-application of the Church's procedures.
3. I acknowledge that in some cases the Royal Commission found that the acts or omissions of some bishops and other Catholic Church leaders amounted to cover up of crimes against children.
4. However, a fair reading of the reports of the Royal Commission does not support Mr Leicester's conclusion that the crimes of Catholic priests and religious against children were *largely* covered up for many decades.
5. Nor does a fair reading of the reports of the Royal Commission support Mr Leicester's conclusion that Catholic bishops and other Catholic Church leaders *invariably* chose to hide the facts rather than report the offender.
6. A fair reading of the reports of the Royal Commission does support the proposition that *some* Catholic bishops and other Catholic Church leaders did choose to hide the facts rather than report the offender.

A balanced view about this issue should be informed by the manner in which the Catholic Church has tightened its internal procedures following the Royal Commission. I refer the Committee in particular to Pope Francis' *motu proprio Vos estis lux mundi* 2019 promulgated on 7 May 2019.

The norms promulgated with *Vos estis* impose upon all Catholic priests and religious a duty of mandatory reporting of the conduct of diocesan bishops and major superiors of religious Institutes “consisting of actions or omissions intended to interfere with or avoid civil investigations” of sexual crimes by Catholic clergy or religious against children. In article 19 the norms are stated to be “without prejudice to the rights and obligations established in each place by state laws, particularly those concerning any reporting obligations to the competent civil authorities.”

It follows that although *Vos estis* imposes a duty of mandatory reporting on priests and religious internally, the norms also respect that similar obligations might be imposed by state law and that the Church’s norms in *Vos estis* do not displace any civil mandatory reporting obligation

Yours sincerely,

✠ Mark Coleridge  
Archbishop of Brisbane  
President