

Senator HUMPHRIES

I also had the privilege of sitting through and participating in the forgotten Australians inquiry and the more recent inquiry, the report of which comes down today. 'Privilege' may be a strange word to use in respect of that process, because it was searing and heartbreaking to hear stories told by Australians of a tragic and disgraceful chapter in Australia's history. We saw evidence of so much neglect and abuse that Australians would not have imagined was going on in their own communities over so many years. In earlier reports we made recommendations to ensure, firstly, that the processes were properly brought to the public's attention and, secondly, that means of redress were put in place for those who had experienced those tragic outcomes.

We went further in this most recent report of the Senate Community Affairs References Committee in order to bear witness to the reality that much of the work we recommended be done through those earlier reports has not yet occurred. There is not a need for further research into what has occurred. There is not a need for further analysis of what steps governments need to take. There is a need for action. That action is missing, particularly on the part of a number of state and territory governments. The action is missing on the part of many churches and other institutions that are and were responsible for the delivery of care to people in their charge. The purpose of this committee's report is to bear witness to the fact that that work is not yet concluded and must be prosecuted by the necessary authorities.

We recommend that the Commonwealth plays a leadership role in this exercise. The Commonwealth was not directly responsible for the administration of many of the facilities where children received abuse, but the Commonwealth funded, through child endowment, the care of those children and the Commonwealth today plays a leadership role in these matters. The call for action to be pursued by the states through the agency and intervention of the Commonwealth is perhaps the most important recommendation of the committee. I particularly note and endorse the call made by the Chair of the Community Affairs References Committee, Senator Siewert, that the government should focus on the need for the Prime Minister to seek from providers of care a statement of their position on redress, reparation and apology to those who were abused in their care and table the result of the work of that inquiry here in the parliament so that the Australian community can see what it is that has occurred and what is yet to occur. These Australians should not be forgotten. They should be honoured for their experience and given every support they need in order to participate fully in the community of which they are part.