

Senator SIEWERT

A number of the members of the Senate Community Affairs References Committee are in the chamber and we would like to speak very briefly to this report. We would like to speak for longer but our time has been limited, so we have agreed to allocate the time amongst ourselves. I found this committee inquiry probably the hardest I have ever done because of the stories I heard about the forgotten Australians and their time in institutions in this country. It was very harrowing. I think all the committee members who heard about the pain and suffering also found it very tough participating in this committee.

The report makes 16 recommendations for further work that we believe needs to be done. Progress has been made in implementing the recommendations from the *Lost Innocents* and the *Forgotten Australians* reports, but there has not been enough progress. So we have made a further 16 recommendations, to which my fellow committee members will also speak. The first two recommendations relate to the need for an apology. These recommendations resulted from the call for an apology from virtually every witness before the committee. It was therefore essential for us to have this as our first recommendations. We believe there needs to be a formal statement of acknowledgement and an apology to the children who suffered hurt and distress or abuse and assault in institutional care. We believe this recommendation has not been picked up from the *Forgotten Australians* report, and we have reiterated the need for that.

We also believe there is a need for the Prime Minister to write to the relevant churches and religious agencies requesting that they provide formal statements concerning the need for such bodies to make reparation to children who suffered abuse and neglect in their care in the last century. We believe there needs to be further work done in the provision of redress schemes in the states that do not yet have redress schemes—those states being South Australia, New South Wales and Victoria. We are calling for government and Commonwealth leadership in this area to encourage these states to pursue putting in place redress schemes. We note there is a range of redress schemes around the country—some are better than others—and we believe there needs to be better coordination of those redress schemes. We have suggested that the Council of Australian Governments looks into these issues.

We believe that this action is very strongly needed. We also believe that the churches need to take steps to ensure that the processes for handling abuse allegations are consistent across all jurisdictions across this country. We have heard various stories from all our witnesses that the redress schemes across the country are different. They have had different support and receptions from various church organisations. We believe there needs to be greater action by the churches and religious organisations in providing support, redress and reparations to the children who were in their care. In view of the time, I seek to continue my remarks at a later date and thoroughly recommend this report to the Senate. I urge the government to implement the recommendations. It is a crying shame that the recommendations from the previous two reports have not been fully implemented, and we urge the government to take on these recommendations very rapidly and see that they are implemented.