

**Special Commission of Inquiry concerning the investigation  
of certain child sexual abuse allegations in the Hunter region**

**Statement by Helen Keevers**

**Former Manager of Child Protection and  
Professional Conduct Unit of the Diocese  
of Maitland-Newcastle of the Catholic Church**

**Prepared February 2013**

1. This statement is made in Response to paragraph 2 of the Terms of Reference contained within the Letters Patent made by the Governor-in-Council on 21 November 2012. Those terms of reference provide:

*a. The extent to which officials of the Catholic Church have cooperated with the investigation including whether the investigation has been hindered or obstructed by, amongst other things, the failure to report alleged criminal offences, the discouraging of witnesses to come forward, the alerting of alleged offenders to possible police actions or the destruction of evidence.*

2. I have done my best to provide all the relevant information I have in the statement below. I will be very pleased to assist the Inquiry in any way that I can in the future.

**Professional experience and background**

3. My professional background relevant to this statement commences in 1977 when I graduated from Sydney University with a Degree in Social Studies. This qualification entitles me to membership of the Australian Association of Social Workers.

4. I also have a post graduate certificate in Business Administration and am a nationally accredited LEADR mediator.

5. I have worked consistently since I graduated in social work in the area of child and family work, and have developed special skill in:

- child protection;
- direct work with families;
- investigation of matters of child protection concern;
- supervision of staff involved in such activities; and
- management of child-protection and family programs and services.

6. I first worked for the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle in 1979 at Centacare Newcastle, the welfare arm of the Catholic Church in that diocese. I left in 1981 to have my first child but was re-employed at Centacare in various roles between and after the births of my three children.
7. From approximately 1999 until June 2009, I held various positions of responsibility in the area of child protection for the Diocese. During my employment at Centacare Newcastle after 1999, I served at different times as Children's Services Manager and Deputy Director and had experience taking statements from *Towards Healing* complainants.
8. At the time of the cessation of my contract with the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle I was the Manager of the Child Protection and Professional Conduct Unit of the Diocese, Zimmerman House. I provided advice direct to Bishop Michael Malone. I had access to all Diocesan records, including archives and was aware of all complaints of a professional conduct nature.
9. I currently hold the position of Regional Manager, Hunter and Central Coast with the Benevolent Society.

**Overview of the foundation/establishment of Zimmerman House and my Role**

10. In August of 2004, an amendment to the Church's Towards Healing Protocol directed each Bishop in Australia to establish a Professional Standards Resource Group to advise on matters involving serious complaints against Church personnel. As Children's Services Manager at Centacare, I was invited to be a member of the group established by Bishop Malone. Until this time I had only had passing contact with the bishop.
11. I recall the other members of this original Resource Group were:
  1. Anne Gleeson from the Catholic Schools Child Protection Unit
  2. *BS*
  3. Sr Pauline Egan, former Chancellor of the Diocese and Provincial of the sisters of St Joseph
  4. Dave Ryan, a retired police sergeant
  5. Stephanie Thomas, Bishop's media Advisor
  6. Fr Bill Burston, former Vicar General and psychologist
  7. Peter Owens, solicitor and
  8. Mark Sullivan, solicitor.
12. I was the only person on this group who was not a devout practising Catholic.
13. Shortly after the Advisory Panel met for the first time, a matter was raised regarding *NP*, a then current parish priest. Catholic Commission for Employment Relations had conducted an audit of all Diocesan HR files on priests within their role as newly appointed Head of

Agency under the changes to the Ombudsman's Act which took place in 2000. A series of complaints regarding NP's behaviour towards children between 1995 and 1997 had been marked for further investigation.

14. In order to have a structure to oversight the conduct of this investigation, Bishop Malone appointed a subcommittee of the Advisory Panel as an Interim Diocesan Child Protection Unit. This subcommittee included myself, Anne Gleeson and Stephanie Thomas and was chaired by BS
15. Additionally, the Bishop invited me to take leave of absence from Centacare to conduct a six month study of the child protection needs of the Diocese so that, in future, systems would be in place to ensure correct procedure was followed. The Bishop had been particularly affected by the decision he made to visit Fr James Fletcher before police charged Fr Fletcher, which consequently alerted Fr Fletcher to the police investigation. The Bishop had reflected on that decision and I believe that he understood it was a mistake. I believe the Bishop was sincere in his wish to not repeat such mistakes, and to develop a correct series of procedures. Bishop Malone also expressed to me a wish to reach out to those affected by abuse by clergy.
16. The study I undertook commenced in November 2004 and was completed in April 2005. Copies of the report of this study published in May 2005 and titled "Towards a Diocesan Child Protection Unit" are kept in both Zimmerman House and in the Diocesan offices.
17. The outcomes of the study recommended a Diocesan wide child protection unit which was to establish systems of prevention, deal with allegations of concern and provide support for survivors.
18. On 8 August 2005, following an internal recruitment process, I was appointed to the position of Manager of this service, originally called the Diocesan Child Protection and Professional Conduct Unit (DCCPCU) and later renamed Zimmerman House in 2008 when the healing arm of the service was established. I was charged with establishing a Diocesan wide child protection service that dealt with child protection education for employees, investigations of child protection matters of concern and healing services for survivors. Additionally, my contract stated I was to be the Bishop's spokesperson on child protection matters when he was not available.
19. Zimmerman House approached historical child protection matters from a very different perspective to previous Church responses, combining a transparency around records and processes with an approach to survivors of abuse that was open, welcoming and affirming.
20. This approach was developed with the intention of providing support for victims of offending priests who were known to the Diocese such as Fr Ryan and Fr Fletcher. Unexpectedly, the openness and welcoming atmosphere

offered by Zimmerman House brought numerous new allegations about existing and previous clergy of the Diocese and some of these allegations later resulted in criminal charges or police and/or Ombudsman investigation

Access to material (ie files at Bishop's House etc)

21. In my role as Manager of Zimmerman House I met regularly with Bishop Malone and we discussed openly and freely all matters of concern.
22. Bishop Malone gave me unrestricted access to all Diocesan records, including archives. He asked me to review all files of historical child protection concerns and to recommend any further actions needed. When it later became necessary, he allowed me to give police access to records when they requested this.
23. Mostly, information regarding confidential professional conduct matters with clergy was kept in a particular locked filing cabinet in the Bishop's office in Hunter Street Newcastle. If I required a file from that cabinet, I would ask Bishop Malone for the file during one of our meetings, or if I needed a file between meetings I would ask ~~Redacted at Commissioner's direction~~ *BS* to access the file for me. After *BS* left the Diocese in 2008, Elizabeth Doyle, the Bishop's personal secretary would open the filing cabinet for me when necessary.
24. The Diocesan archives (also in the Hunter Street Newcastle offices) were a source of information when conducting investigations into historical matters of concern. With the Bishop's permission, when it was necessary, I gained access to information held in the archives with the assistance of Diocesan employee, Julie Cox who looked after these records.
25. There was also a locked cupboard in a locked filing room in the Zimmerman House building in Gipps St Carrington where I kept all records of investigations I conducted into child protection matters involving clergy. Zimmerman House was closed after I left the Diocese and was absorbed into the redesigned Zimmerman Services. I do not know what became of these records.
26. There was another set of records in the Diocese relevant to historical investigations of child protection matters which I was unable to access. The Diocese maintained a special fund, called the Maitland Clergy Fund, which was available to fund necessary disbursements for priests of the Diocese such as the purchase of vehicles, costs associated with study, travel costs etc. Once each year parishes held a special Clergy Fund collection during mass. Parishioners contributed to this collection to support clergy expenses.
27. Monsignor Alan Hart administered the Clergy Fund for many years on behalf

of the Trustees of the Diocese. At some stage before my appointment to the position of Manager of Zimmerman House, Mons Hart moved the records of the Clergy fund from Diocesan offices in Hunter Street into his home at Newcastle Presbytery. Any request for information from these records was responded to by Mons Hart. Direct access to the records was not given

28. Apart from the places mentioned above in the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle, other records of Diocesan professional conduct matters exist in three places to my knowledge:

1. The National Professional Standards Office in Polding House in Sydney where the records of Towards Healing complaints are kept.
2. Catholic Church Insurance Offices in Melbourne where records of payments to survivors are kept and
3. A storage facility near the Australian Catholic Bishop's Conference (ACBC) offices in Canberra where all records of Encompass Australasia, the Church's in-house treatment facility for offending clergy, were taken when Encompass was suddenly closed in 2008.

29. I am aware that a complete record of the McAlinden file was sent to Catholic Church Insurance (CCI) Offices around 2008. I sent this file for an opinion when I sought advice from CCI on potential insurance coverage for victims' claims against the Diocese.

Victims of Fr McAlinden and Fr Fletcher I am aware of who made disclosures to the church re abuse and details re same

#### Fr McAlinden

30. In the course of my employment, I became aware of numerous victims of Fr McAlinden. I cannot recall all their names and all details, but I set out below the relevant facts, to the best of my memory and knowledge.

31. The names of the victims I recall are:

- a) AJ
- b) AC
- c) AE
- d) AL
- e) AK

32. REDACTED

33. There were settlements of claims recorded on Fr McAlinden's file for a woman called AC and another woman called AE. I'm not sure of the dates of these settlements. I know AE has since died.

34.

REDACTED

35.

REDACTED

36.

REDACTED

37. There were numerous other victims and I am aware of at least 9 of them, including those listed above. Those listed above are the only names I can recall.

38. Zimmerman House made contact with a number of victims of Fr McAlinden and organised support services for them. The victims (all female) ranged in age from their 30s to their 70's. All had been abused as young girls around the ages of 8-11 years. About six of the women formed a support group that used to meet at Zimmerman House regularly. One young woman in her 30's named ABB was abused in New Zealand by Fr McAlinden. She travelled over from New Zealand at Diocesan expense to receive an apology from Bishop Malone and to meet other survivors. Maureen O'Hearn of Zimmerman House would have the names of all known MacAlinden victims.

Fr Fletcher

39. The victims of Fr James Fletcher that I am aware have made disclosures to the Diocese of Maitland Newcastle are:

- a) AH
- b) AB
- c) Peter Gogarty

Relevant dealings with ~~redacted~~ or Fr Lucas in relation to disclosures to the Church

40.

REDACTED

41. I had no direct dealings with Fr Brian Lucas at any time during my role as Manager of Zimmerman House. I had read his name in certain files regarding the handling of historical matters.

Dealings with Bishop Malone on issues relevant to disclosures to outside authorities in relation to complaints of abuse.

42. I witnessed Bishop Malone's regret at his handling of the Fletcher matter and his determination to implement systems that ensured such mistakes were not repeated.

43. Part of my role as Manager of Zimmerman House was to advise the Bishop on reporting requirements when complaints of abuse were received. Despite considerable opposition, both from within and outside the Diocese, to an approach of complete compliance and transparency, I witnessed Bishop Malone's steadfast adherence to reporting requirements. This approach resulted in criminal charges being laid against four members of the Diocesan clergy, as well as numerous Ombudsman's investigations of clergy.

44.

REDACTED

45. Redacted for relevance.

46. Redacted for relevance.

47. Redacted for relevance

48. Redacted for relevance

49. Redacted for relevance

50. Redacted for relevance

51. Redacted for relevance

52. Redacted for relevance

53. Redacted for relevance

54. Redacted for relevance

55. Redacted for relevance



56. Redacted for relevance

57. Redacted for relevance

58. Redacted for relevance

59. Redacted for relevance

60. Redacted for relevance

61. Redacted for Relevance

62. Redacted for Relevance

63. Redacted for Relevance

- 10 -

64. Redacted for Relevance

65. Redacted for Relevance

66. Redacted for Relevance

**The removal of material from Zimmerman House files - when, why, to whom provided - what subsequently occurred with that material (i.e. my view as to how it entered the public domain)**

67. When I first met *AL*, victim of Fr Dennis McAlinden, in 2008 she was extremely distressed and very angry with the Diocese around the way her matter had been treated in 1995. I became aware that she had been sending abusive emails to the Bishop and Diocesan personnel. The Bishop and I had seen this rage like behaviour from survivors before. It was the approach of Zimmerman House to make contact with anyone communicating with the Diocese in this way to attempt to understand their perspective.

68. I made contact with *AL* and gradually gained her trust. I introduced her to Bishop Malone who offered her a formal apology. She received this well

*REDACTED*

69. I had seen the McAlinden file and was aware that the Diocese had attempted to laicise Fr McAlinden. I understood police knew about Fr McAlinden but was not aware at what time this information had come to police attention. I knew the Ombudsman's child protection amendments to legislation did not exist in 1993 and consequently notification to this authority was not possible then.

70. *AL*, continued to become more and more distressed. *Redacted* discussed possible strategies for alleviating her distress with Bishop Malone and, with his approval, copied pages of the MacAlinden file relating to laicisation of Fr McAlinden for *AL*. I gave these to her in 2008. She did seem to find this information comforting. It had

- 11 -

been distressing to her that McAlinden had remained a member of the clergy and no attempt had been made (she previously believed) to remove these rights.

71

REDACTED

72

REDACTED

73. At no stage did I ever provide copies of any documents to Joanne McCarthy.

Any guidance, protocols, policies or oral suggestions made to me regarding my obligation or those of others in authority within the Dioceses regarding reporting of sexual abuse to outside authorities (whether Police, Ombudsman etc)

74. I believe that the negative child protection history of the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle came to light because, with Bishop Malone's approval, the Diocese experienced four years of complete transparency around issues of concern between 2005 and 2009.

75. The Bishop fully supported an approach of open reporting to authorities during my employment as Manager of Zimmerman House. We spoke often of this need both during our private discussions and in public meetings. I witnessed the distress this caused the Bishop when information came to light which required reporting to authorities matters of concern involving clergy known well to him. At no stage did this distress prevent him from approving notification to authorities.

76. There was opposition to this approach from within the Diocese and I believe the Council of Priests disagreed with the Bishop's approach to transparency and strict observance of secular legal responsibility for reporting to both the Ombudsman and Police.

77. I met with the Diocesan clergy at a Retreat in September 2007 shortly after the standing down of NP4; Diocesan priest, pending a Police and

- 12 -

Ombudsman's investigation. Paul Davis, consultant solicitor, and I gave a presentation relating to reporting responsibilities under criminal and civil law. During the discussion at the time certain clergy quoted Cannon Law and its precedence in Church matters.

78. The Catholic Church in Australia has written protocols for dealing with allegations of historical child sexual abuse. These protocols are known as the Towards Healing protocols which were developed in 1996 and have been twice reviewed in 2000 and 2010.

79. I have viewed the most recent *Towards Healing* Procedures on line and note that, since the review, completed in 2010, the procedures now advise Contact Persons (volunteers taking complaints) that the Church has a "strong preference" for criminal matters being reported to Police and directs them to report all potential crimes to the Director of Professional Standards who will pass such matters on to the Police. These procedures were not in place when I was taking Towards Healing complaints in 2003 and 2004.

80. According to the protocol at that time, I had to ask survivors to sign a document saying they were not going to the police before any discussion of "healing" (which most often equated with financial settlement) occurred.

My opinion as to matters relating to TOR 2 generally

81. It is my clear understanding from reading the files maintained by the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle during the time of my professional appointment there, that on several occasions Diocesan authorities ignored complaints and warnings about priests and church employees of concern: Fr Dennis McAlinden

REDACTED

82

83

REDACTED -  
RELEVANCE

84.

85.

86.

87.

REDACTED -

RELEVANCE

88.

89.

90.

91.

92.

Signed

**Helen Keevers**  
**15 February 2013**

**INDEX OF DOCUMENTS PRODUCED BY HELEN KEEVERS**

No.	DESCRIPTION	DATE
1.	Extract from <i>Towards a Diocesan Child Protection Unit 2005</i> – outlining preferred model for DCPPCU	2004/2005

Redacted for Relevance

Redacted for Relevance

Redacted for Relevance

Redacted for Relevance

---

The model recommended by this study builds on strengths that exist within the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle. The model can be implemented with minimal disruption and economic outlay, but is sufficiently flexible to provide a base for expansion as areas of need are identified.

#### **4.1 Proposed Model.**

The service recommended is "outward looking" and integrated within the existing network of community child protection services, rather than a "Church only" response to the matter as has been provided primarily in the past.

Efforts have been made to consider the impact of the service on all stakeholders and to build relationships with relevant community partners.

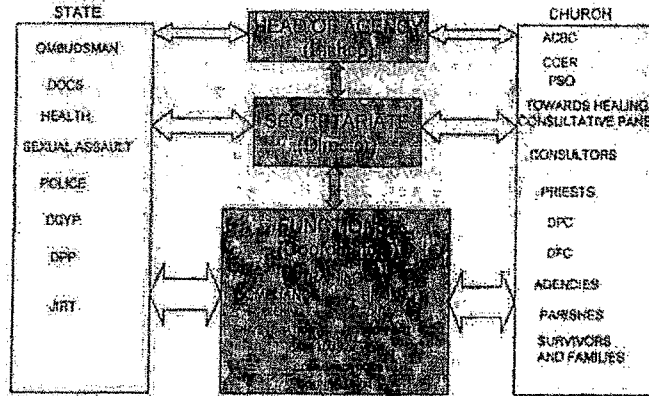
A model of child protection service is proposed which addresses needs in the following areas:

- 1) a legislative compliant response to conducting fair investigations;
- 2) child protection education, training and prevention services;
- 3) a centralised screening unit; and
- 4) systems for victim support and community healing.



**DIOCESE OF MAITLAND-NEWCASTLE  
DIOCESAN CHILD PROTECTION UNIT**

FUNCTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS FROM 1 July 2004



*\*note width of arrow indicates degree of contact*

The model proposes the appointment of a **Director of Child Protection Services in the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle** who would report directly to the bishop on child protection matters. The Director would be responsible for ensuring that a coordinated approach to child protection is introduced across the diocese.

This would include:

- developing relevant policies and procedures;
- overseeing the development and delivery of training modules;
- ensuring a comprehensive approach to child protection investigations is introduced across all diocesan departments and services;
- establishing a centralised diocesan child protection screening system and database.

- 
- continually monitoring policy and practice to ensure services remain of the highest standard;
  - introducing a system of victim support services; and
  - promoting community healing in affected communities.

The Director of Child Protection would be assisted by the following staff:

**A Coordinator of Diocesan Child Protection Training** who would be responsible for the development of child protection training modules which address the cultural differences of diocesan departments and services and for ensuring these modules were delivered appropriately across the diocese.

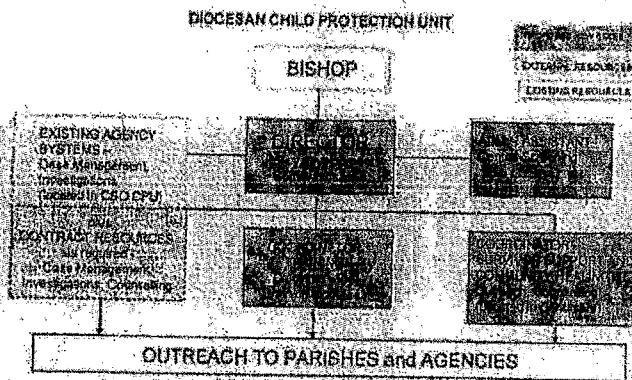
**An Administrative Assistant** who assists the Director to establish a centralised child protection screening system and database, maintains this system and assists in the administrative tasks of child protection investigations.

**A Coordinator of Survivor Support and Community Healing Services** who works with the Director to introduce best practice approaches to supporting survivors of abuse within the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle and develops strategies to educate, support and heal affected communities.

Under this proposed model, the existing CSO CPU would be relocated to the Diocesan Child Protection Unit to continue their work within the Catholic schools system of the diocese and would become directly accountable to the Director, Child Protection Services.

Increased capacity in conducting child protection investigations will be necessary to deal with any diocesan child protection matters which arise. This capacity could be met by:

- 1) the employment of a Diocesan Child Protection Officer who works alongside the CSO CPU Child Protection Officers to case manage diocesan investigations. /OR
- 2) the contracting of external expertise to case manage diocesan matters with the assistance of the Director.



In the initial stages of the DCPU the second alternative of contracted case management of investigations is the most viable alternative. If diocesan child protection investigations increase as a result of education, it may be necessary to employ a Diocesan Child Protection Officer.

Diocesan agencies with investigative experience could be supported by the Diocesan Child Protection Unit in conducting their investigations.