

**Hon. Mark McGowan MLA  
PREMIER OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA**



**EVENT:  
ROYAL COMMISSION RESPONSE AND APOLOGY**

**VENUE:  
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

**DATE:  
27 JUNE 2018**

**TIME:  
NOON**

**\*\* 15 MINUTE SPEECH \*\***

- I rise today to announce the West Australian Government's response to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.
- The Royal Commission has been a feature of public life in this nation since 2013.
- The Commission was a difficult, solemn and worthwhile undertaking, that has shone a light on the experience of thousands of Australians who had been ignored by society for so long.
- Night after night, Australia has heard the stories of survivors of unimaginable abuse.
- Abuse that for decades had been swept under the rug and ignored.
- Abuse of children by those who were charged with their care and protection.
- An incredible failure of the institutions our nation trusted.
- Abuse that occurred in schools, boarding houses, sporting facilities, swimming pools, beaches, the bush, social services, the armed forces
- Religious institutions; across faiths and denominations.
- The Salvation Army, the YMCA, the Scouts, Swimming Australia.
- A pattern that no one saw, or no one wanted to see.
- What shocked our nation, is that the places and the institutions where abuse occurred were so normal.

- So common.
- So Australian.
- Institutions woven into the fabric of society
- Abuse hidden in plain sight.
- Widespread abuse and inaction on the claims and reports of survivors, was normalised.
- Reputations of institutions and the accused were put ahead of the interests of children.
- Reputations of institutions and the accused were put before justice.
- Make no mistake
- This is not the case of a few isolated incidents in an otherwise healthy system.
- This was an endemic problem.
- The numbers from this Royal Commission are astounding, and expose the lie of “a few bad apples” for what it is.
- The Commission was contacted by 16,953 people who were within their terms of reference. They heard from 7,981 survivors of child sexual abuse across 8,013 sessions.
- They received 1,344 written accounts
- They referred 2,562 matters to police.

- 3,489 institutions were the subject of allegations of where abuse have occurred.
- 58% of survivors have said their abuse happened in a religious institution
- 32.5% in a Government-run institution
- The average age of a survivor's first abuse was ten years old.
- Over 20% of survivors experienced abuse in more than one institution.
- 14.9% of survivors identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.
- Each of these 7,981 survivors who told their story are more than a statistic
- Each one has their own devastating story.
- And only they will know the true horror and impact of what happened to them.
- Let us not forget, there are countless more who chose not to tell their story.
- And those who passed before they ever got their chance.
- Just as we cannot ignore the crimes that have been reported, equally we cannot ignore the breach of trust that has occurred in our nation.
- These institutions, whether religious, Government or otherwise, have been important civic cornerstones for many generations.

- Institutions, and the individuals within them, have commanded respect and deference.
- For those institutions to rely on that respect and deference, to protect and hide those who have committed crimes, is a gross breach of society's trust.
- And that trust must be rebuilt.
- While much of the coverage has focussed on interstate experiences, Western Australia has had its share of horrors.
- Case Study Eleven, concerning Christian Brothers institutions at Castledare, Clontarf, Tardun and Bindoon make for harrowing reading.
- Disturbing testimony of the kind of abuse that occurred, and the conditions children were kept in, in remote corners of Western Australia, across multiple decades.
- Allegations of sexual abuse against 16 named Brothers at one or more of the institutions. Eight Brothers were named as perpetrators at more than one institution
- A concerted campaign of physical and emotional intimidation, keeping children in a state of 'constant terror' to conceal that sexual abuse.
- Case Study Twelve, which deals with an Independent Anglican School in Western Australia reminds us that child sexual abuse in institutions is not a problem of the past alone.

- Between 1999 and 2005, eight complaints to school leadership were made of a teacher at the school, from parents and fellow teachers.
- Action to stand the teacher down, with pay, was only taken when complaints were made by a former student in 2009.
- Ultimately the teacher was found guilty of 13 counts of indecently dealing with a child under the age of 13, across five complainants.
- The commission noted the pattern of behaviour of the offender, grooming children in his class, who were new to the school, who were naturally socially isolated, and in turn further isolated due to bullying they received from the extra attention.
- The teacher would also strike up friendships with victim's mothers, making it more difficult for the victims to report the behaviour to their parents.
- Shockingly, the school did not notify the police until 2009, despite the complaints from both teachers and parents.
- The only prior action it took against the teacher, was to write to him, outlining their concerns.
- In the final report, there's an excerpt of testimony from one unidentified woman, which stayed with me.
- About how she felt abandoned by the rest of the community.

- And it reads as follows:
- “I have never really been able to come to terms with the part society played – or didn’t play, I guess, being the point. You know, the people turning the blind eye, people not recognising things when they were in a position that they should have been educated to recognise. People not wanting to listen. People putting their own businesses, or money, or schools above the health and wellbeing of a child. These are the things that I find hard to forgive.”
- I do not blame her.
- We cannot make this right.
- We can never undo what has happened.
- The knowledge of that is a burden we must bear and will not erase from history.
- But we can do our best to make amends
- And ensure it is never repeated again.
- I would like to state simply.
- On behalf of the West Australian Government, I apologise unreservedly for the sexual abuse of children in West Australian Government institutions.
- The Government had a duty of care for the children in its protection.
- And the State of Western Australia failed in that duty.

- For that, I apologise.
- More broadly, for children in WA who experienced sexual abuse in any institution.
- I apologise.
- You experienced something horrible.
- Unimaginable to many of us here.
- You had your innocence stolen.
- Your faith and trust in society broken.
- Authorities did not recognise the pattern.
- For that, the Government of Western Australia and myself are truly sorry.
- While no amount of money can make up for what has occurred.
- We recognise that redress is an important element for our nation moving forward.
- So today, I am formally announcing that Western Australia will be joining the National Redress Scheme.
- Following extensive negotiation with the Commonwealth, the State of Western Australia has resolved its issues with the scheme, and we can join knowing the concerns of Western Australians have been addressed.

- We hope Redress will go some way towards recognising what you endured and lived with, and treat you with the dignity and respect you have always deserved.
- We hope it will go some way to providing support to survivors, if they need it.
- Legislation required for our participation in the scheme will come to Parliament in coming months, however West Australians will be able to apply for Redress from the 1st of July 2018.
- While WA last year removed the statute of limitations for pursuing justice through the courts for historical sexual abuse, which will receive royal assent, also on the first of July, we want West Australians to be able to access Redress through the national system, if that is what they prefer.
- Without the need to engage lawyers. Without the need to give evidence and relive the past in a court. And with support provided by the Commonwealth Government while they do so.
- While we acknowledge the additional time taken for WA to announce our opting-in, we wanted all WA victims and survivors to have the option of seeking Redress without the additional burden of litigation, that they deserve.

- And I thank the Attorney General, John Quigley MLA, and the Minister for Child Protection, Simone McGurk MLA, for the work they undertook to ensure every West Australian who deserves Redress can access it.
- Many of those who have been in contact with the prison system - in recognition of how the abuse you survived can impact the rest of your life
- Those who were brought to Western Australia by the Commonwealth as Child Migrants – left vulnerable at the hands of those who were meant to protect you
- The next step is to ensure this cannot happen again.
- Current and future generations of children cannot be subject to the same neglect of endemic abuse of past generations.
- The Royal Commission has taken five long years to do its work.
- The Commission and over those years, it has done difficult, but extraordinary work.
- And earned the trust of those who had campaigned for a Royal Commission over so many years.
- It is now the responsibility of Governments and institutions to deliver on that work.
- And the West Australian Government will deliver.

- The Minister for Child Protection will follow shortly with more of our response to the recommendations applicable to the State Government.
- While change will not be instant, there will be change.
- As the final report states, the sexual abuse of a child is intolerable in a civilised society.
- Never again can our Government or institutions turn a blind eye to abuse, or worse, hide the perpetrators.
- I am sure I speak for all West Australians when I say, this can never happen again.
- And that we are truly sorry for what has occurred.
- Thank you

ENDS