



 VATICAN AUSTRALIA

Catholic leaders respond to final report of Australian Royal Commission

A report on how institutions in Australia have historically addressed sexual abuse of minors has prompted responses from Church leaders at the universal and the local level.

By Christopher Wells

The Holy See Press Office has issued a statement in response to an Australian commission's final report on "institutional responses to child sex abuse."

The Vatican statement acknowledges the “thorough efforts” of the commission and says the report “**deserves to be studied seriously.**” It reiterates the commitment of the Holy See to being close to the **Church in Australia** as it responds to the sex abuse crisis. The statement also noted recent remarks of **Pope Francis** to the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors. The pontiff said “**the Church is called to be a place of compassion**, especially for those who have suffered, and reaffirmed that **the Church is committed to safe environments** for the protection of all children and vulnerable adults.

Catholic leaders in Australia were also quick to react to the report. The President of the **Australian Catholic Bishops Conference**, **Archbishop Denis Hart** of Melbourne, said, “This is a shameful past, in which a prevailing culture of secrecy and self-protection led to unnecessary suffering for many victims and their families.” He unequivocally apologized “for this suffering,” and re-iterated the Church’s commitment “to ensuring justice for those affected.”

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sex Abuse was given the task of investigating how various institutions, including the Church in Australia, have historically dealt with sexual abuse. The final report was highly critical of the Australian Church’s past response and offered numerous recommendations for improvement. However, concerns have been raised against some of the Commission’s recommendations, especially the call to compel priests to violate the seal of the confessional.

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16 December 2017, 08:33