



COIN

COMMISSION OF INQUIRY NOW

Justice for victims of Catholic Clergy Sexual Assault in Victoria

1 June 2012

The Hon Georgie Crozier MLC,
Chairman, Family and Community Development
Committee, Parliament of Victoria, Spring Street
MELBOURNE VIC 3000
By email: georgie.crozier@parliament.vic.gov.au

Dear Ms Crozier,

Inquiry into Handling of Child Abuse by Religious and other Organisations - Committee's Approach and Resourcing.

COIN is a not-for-profit community group comprised of people with a particular professional (and sometimes personal) interest in the subject matter of the Committee's Inquiry.

(1) Committee's Approach to Terms of Reference: COIN's mandate, as its acronym suggests, is specific and confined: to campaign for the establishment of an independent, properly resourced judicial inquiry into sexual assault by Catholic clergy in Victoria.

For several reasons (to be developed in subsequent submissions), COIN considers that the government's decision to refer this matter to a Parliamentary Committee is an inappropriate and inadequate response to a very large, complex, and significant social, economic and legal problem in Victoria. COIN will continue to campaign for the establishment of an independent judicial inquiry.

Further, COIN believes that the Committee's Terms of Reference announced on 17/4/2012 are impossibly broad, such as to render the Committee's task, if the results are to have any value, un-manageable. With literally thousands of religious and non-government organisations embraced by the Terms of Reference and thus, potentially at least, to be examined by the Committee, COIN fears that the Committee is in danger of pursuing a broad-brush superficial and inconsequential inquiry. COIN urges the Committee to pursue, by contrast, a focused, detailed examination of the main perpetrator of sexual assault of Victorian children, ie, the clergy and hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church.

COIN further believes that the Committee's membership, powers, procedures and current lack of adequate resources, mandates that it should pursue such a limited examination in detail, ie, one confined to sexual assault by catholic clergy in Victoria. This, we believe, would in itself be a very large and complex problem that will pose significant burdens upon the Committee. Any other approach, COIN believes, is likely to lead to superficial treatment and allow the Catholic Church hierarchy in particular to avoid close and thorough scrutiny.

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COIN thus urges the Committee to:

(1) pursue such a focused inquiry only, and include in its final recommendations that the government should commission a further independent judicial inquiry into outstanding aspects of the current Terms of Reference (including, if as appears likely, the Committee runs out of time and/or resources, outstanding aspects of its inquiry into sexual assault by Catholic clergy);

(2) if necessary, seek amendments to its current Terms of Reference to both facilitate such a focused approach and extend the reporting deadline.

(2) Committee's Resourcing: As to the question of the Committee's resources, we understand that the Committee is about to submit its resourcing requests to the government to enable the Committee to properly conduct its Inquiry, formulate recommendations, and report by the stated deadline of 30 April 2013.

As mentioned, our members' focus is on the nature and extent of catholic clergy sexual assault in Victoria, and the mishandling by the church hierarchy of both many perpetrators over many years, and further, the mishandling of complaints made to church authorities by victims, and those assisting them.

COIN is aware of more than 400 victims who have officially complained and of hundreds more who have not. Doubtless the several victim support groups operating in Victoria know of thousands more. Many of these victims are damaged as a result of their traumatic experiences and as a result, face real difficulties in approaching the Committee to make submissions.

We suggest that the Committee will need the following resources to properly conduct even the limited inquiry into the Catholic church perpetrators, and the church hierarchy's grossly unjust and offensive response, mentioned above:

1. Senior Counsel assisting;
2. two junior Counsel assisting (one male, one female);
3. Clear power to issue warrants of search and seizure and officials to execute these;
4. Clear power to compel evidence as required by the Committee, and power to deal with those who fail to comply in a timely manner;
5. Significant office and storage space to house research and administrative staff, and to store and have access to the hundreds of thousands of documents COIN anticipates will be produced voluntarily to the Committee;
6. Numerous skilled researchers, IT and administrative staff to collate, order and systematise the documentation produced to the Inquiry both voluntarily and in response to summonses issued.
7. Up to date computer software to enable comprehensive and swift searching across documents with common themes, names and dates.
8. Funds for Victim Support Groups operating in Victoria to enable them to assist victims suffering literacy and other disabilities to prepare written and/or oral submissions to the Inquiry that are relevant, comprehensive, and of most assistance to the Committee.

If you would like to discuss COIN's ideas further, please contact me at coinbkc@optusnet.com.au.

COIN appreciates the Committee's consideration of the matters raised above, and I await your reply.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "B. A. Keon-Cohen". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Bryan Keon-Cohen
President

Cc
All Committee members