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Dr Janine Bush
Executive Officer
Family and Community Development Committee
Parliament House
Spring Street
East Melbourne, Vic 3002

20 September 2012

Dear Dr Bush

RE: SCOUTS AUSTRALIA – VICTORIAN BRANCH SUBMISSION

This submission is made on behalf of Scouts Australia – Victorian Branch (Scouts Victoria) to assist the Committee in its enquiry into the processes by which religious and other non-government organisations respond to the criminal abuse of children by personnel within their organisations. Scouts Victoria wholly supports the enquiry.

1. Practices, policies, and protocols of Scouts Victoria for handling allegations of criminal abuse.

Scouts Victoria has a number of practices and policies in place to avoid criminal abuse of children, and if any such allegations are made to deal with them in the context of our zero tolerance policy of child abuse.

Scouts Victoria requires all adults, applying to join the association to hold a current Working with Children Card (WWC); consent to a National Police and Character Check as well as undertake a suitability interview by a District Personnel Committee (DPC). For well over 30 years all potential Scout Leaders had to be and are still being Police cleared – this is compulsory not an option.

All approved adult leaders then receive comprehensive and ongoing training in dealing with children and the various aspects of Scouting. All leaders must sign a document under which they agree to abide by a Code of Conduct: see Information Hand Book (appendix 1) at p 34. All leaders are appointed for an initial three year period after which the relevant DPC must undertake a review of their performance: see Information Hand Book at p 33

We have two formal policy documents dealing with inappropriate conduct or behaviour and child protection, these are:

- (i) The “Inappropriate Conduct or Behaviour Policy”, and
- (ii) The “Child Protection & Protection from Harm Policy” copies of which are attached to this submission as appendices 2 and 3.

The Inappropriate Conduct or Behaviour Policy sets out Scouts Victoria’s procedure in managing an allegation of misconduct. In practice cl 4.4 of the policy is implemented such that in the event of any serious allegation, such as of sexual abuse or other criminal conduct, the Adult in Scouting in respect of which the allegation is made will be suspended from their role.

The policy of Scouts Victoria is, in the case of an allegation of criminal abuse of a child, to report the matter directly to the police, if this has not already occurred. The procedure for managing an internal investigation into the allegation is set out in cl 4.10 to 4.15 of the policy. In an appropriate case Scouts Victoria will defer an internal investigation until a police investigation is complete.

Scouts Victoria also has a Local Complaints Resolution Procedure (appendix 4) and a procedure for dealing with Grievances and Disputes: see p 38 of the Information Hand Book.

2. Whether there are systemic practices in such organisations that operate to preclude or discourage the reporting of suspected criminal abuse of children to State authorities; and

Scouts Victoria has a zero tolerance policy to allegations of any criminal child abuse with any allegation being reported directly to the Police. In the event that the alleged abuse is against an adult the practice of Scouts Victoria is to encourage the adult to report the matter to the police. In either case the leader concerned is immediately stood down from all Scouting responsibilities until such time as the Police have completed their investigations.

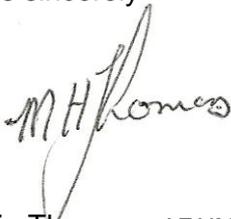
3. Whether changes to law or to practices, policies and protocols in such organisations are required to help prevent criminal abuse of children by personnel in such organisations and to deal with allegations of such abuse.

Scouts Victoria does not have a strong view that changes to the law are required but would support education programmes which would encourage children to report any criminal abuse. Scouts Victoria strongly supports any steps which would reduce the potential for criminal abuse of children and which would encourage the reporting of any allegations of criminal abuse.

In regards to your letter dated 5th September 2012, Scouts Victoria wishes to advise the Committee that a response to the very detailed questions asked is being prepared and will be sent to you as soon as is practical.

On behalf of Scouts Victoria I would like to thank the Family & Community Development Committee for the opportunity to make this submission. I understand that this submission and the appendices may be made public. Scouts Victoria has no objection to this.

Yours sincerely



Martin Thomas - AFAIM, MAICD
Executive Manager & General Secretary
Scouts Victoria

Annexures:

1. Victorian Info Book 2012
2. Inappropriate Conduct or Behaviour Policy
3. Child Protection & Protection from Harm Policy
4. Local Complaints Resolution Procedure
5. Extract - P5 Personnel Management - Scouts Australia – Policy & Rules 2008 -
6. Protecting Your Children “A Parent’s Guide” - Scouts Australia Publication