

NZ Royal Commission - Invited Australian Input

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Two Australian experts were invited to provide testimony to the New Zealand Commission Of Inquiry Into Historical Abuse In State Care And In The Care Of Faith-based Institutions, which began initial Hearings in February 2019. It is NZ's biggest public inquiry ever, has a budget of NZ\$79 million and is expected to run for 4 years. It is examining what happened to children, young people and vulnerable adults in State and faith-based care in Aotearoa New Zealand between the years 1950-99. It may also listen to survivor experiences before and after these dates.

In relation to State Care the Inquiry is specifically investigating why people were taken into care, what abuse happened and why, and the effects of the abuse. It is specifically focusing on Māori, Pasefika and disabled people because of the disproportionate number of people from these communities in care.

There are four important elements of this inquiry. Following establishment of guidelines, the Commission then moved into an information and evidence gathering phase. Based on the evidence gathered, two reports will be produced with recommendations for addressing future responsibility - one at the end of 2020 and the second in 2023.

Contextual Hearing

The Contextual Hearing was the first public hearing of the Inquiry and was conducted between 29 October and 8 November 2019. It heard from witnesses on topics providing rich context for the wide ranging Inquiry over the next few years.

Emeritus Professor Desmond Cahill (RMIT University) and Dr Peter Wilkinson (immediate Past President Catholics For Renewal) who are highly qualified, experienced and recognised researchers, church historians and policy experts in this field were invited to summarise on Friday 8th November key recommendations of the Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and similar inquiries in other parts of the world. Their comprehensive testimony summarised their formal submission and followed powerful testimony at the start of this session by abuse survivor Mike Ledingham. The sensitivity and respect shown to this survivor by the Commission was strongly evident and itself part of a healing process in keeping with the very spirit of the NZ Royal Commission. This is built on on the Waitangi principles of "partnership, protection and participation" which is central to the work of the Inquiry and a core focus of its Māori Partnerships team.

User-friendly

In a user-friendly way deliberations were live video-streamed across New Zealand and the world to survivors, family members and supporters, academics, representatives of interested organisations, and members of the public who watched the hearing directly from the public gallery.

Mostly a factual summary of Australian Royal Commission findings and those from major related major international inquiries, testimony from Des & Peter also highlighted key common conclusions around the

world. Far from being Australians suggesting what NZ ought to do the presentations objectively reported deliberations on child sexual abuse, emphasising those considered likely to be of particular relevance and interest to ongoing NZ RC deliberations. They also responded comprehensively to a number of specific questions inviting personal opinions, based on their expertise, past experience, relevant research and personal backgrounds. Amongst issues raised there was particular interest in the means of engaging the Holy See, Holy See responses to ACBC representations on RC Recommendations, and the issue of the seal of confession.

Process

The openness of the NZ Royal Commission process is further illustrated by 12 powerful short videos (around 3 minutes each) from abuse survivor-advocates on the NZ RC website. Friday's hearing incorporated testimony from an abuse survivor and was following by testimony from Des and Peter effectively showcasing the well managed and user-friendly NZ RC Inquiry process itself. Friday concluded the Contextual Hearing which will be followed by Public Hearings. The First Report to Government is due in Dec 2020, and the Final Report in January 2023. Friday was also the final day of the inaugural Inquiry Chair Sir Anand Satyanand who chose not to continue in that role when the RC scope was widely extended beyond victims of State Care to also cover victims of all Institutions including the Catholic Church.

On 14 November the Commission of Inquiry welcomed Judge Coral Shaw as its new Chairperson to lead it through the delivery phase of the Inquiry.

Video-streaming

As observed via video-streaming the testimony provided by Des and Peter was exceptionally well prepared, and presented clearly, authoritatively and very accessibly. It summarised major issues likely to be relevant to the NZ Royal Commission. The extraordinary amount of work in carefully preparing such comprehensive evidence, then presenting it clearly to the Commissioners and public last Friday was acknowledged, and as expressed by one Counsel "lays an enormously valuable foundation for the NZ Royal Commission to begin its faith-based investigation."

Access

The formal submission from Des and Peter is available [HERE](#). The Friday Contextual Hearing may be viewed [HERE](#)

The Royal Commission site can be accessed [HERE](#)