

Statement from Cardinal George Pell
20 May 2015

Like everyone who has been following the Royal Commission's hearings in Ballarat this week, I have been horrified once again by survivors' accounts of the abuse they have suffered. Also the terrible impact it has had on their lives and families and the Catholic community of Ballarat. The suicide of so many victims is an enormous tragedy. The crimes committed against them by priests and brothers are profoundly evil and completely repugnant to me.

A number of claims have been made concerning my own response during these years. Many of the issues have already been addressed by me in the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry in 2013, and my submission to that inquiry, and a transcript of my evidence, are available on the Victorian Parliament's website. I stand by the statements I made to the Victorian Parliament.

I also note that under its terms of reference the Royal Commission can access all material from previous inquiries, including the Victorian Inquiry, which dealt with these matters extensively.

The Commission stated today that it will request a statement from me.

Over the last 24 hours I have been accused of being complicit in the moving of a known paedophile, of ignoring a victim's complaint, and of bribery. These matters again require an immediate response and it is important to correct the record particularly given the false and misleading headlines.

Firstly, while out of the greatest respect for Mr Green, as I have stated previously, I have no recollection of a conversation with Mr Green in 1974, more than 40 years ago. Having recently read his statement to the Commission I still cannot remember Mr. Green or the conversation. To the best of my belief, this conversation did not happen. I stand by my previous statements.

Secondly, I never moved Ridsdale out of Mortlake Parish. I never moved him anywhere. I would never have condoned or participated in a decision to transfer Ridsdale in the knowledge that he had abused children, and I did not do so. I was a member of the College of Consultors for Ballarat from 1977 until I left Ballarat in 1984. Membership of the Consultors gave me no authority over Gerald Ridsdale or any other priest in Ballarat.

My recollection is that Bishop Mulkearns did not raise any paedophilia allegations against Ridsdale at the Consultors meetings I attended, or at any time before or after such meetings.

Contrary to some media reports, minutes of the meetings of the Consultors are not "secret" and were produced to the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry which did not raise them in the hearings or in their final report. Indeed, I addressed these meetings in my submission to the Victorian Inquiry.

Finally, I was and remain extremely sympathetic to David Ridsdale who because of his uncle suffered horrible abuse. I continue to regret the misunderstanding between us. At no time did I attempt to bribe David Ridsdale or his family or offer any financial inducements for him to be silent. At the time of our discussion the police were already aware of allegations against Gerald Ridsdale and were investigating. Then, and now, I supported these police investigations. I have previously made a sworn denial of these allegations and I reiterate that denial.

I am committed to complete cooperation with the Royal Commission. I will address in full all matters it wishes to raise in any statement requested from me before I make any further comment.

I have the deepest sympathy for the victims of abuse, their families and the community of Ballarat for what they have suffered. Once again, I will answer allegations and criticisms of my behaviour openly and honestly.

ENDS