



27 July 2016

## ARCHBISHOP ANTHONY FISHER OP RESPONDS TO ALLEGATIONS AGAINST CARDINAL PELL ON ABC 7.30 REPORT

The allegations against Cardinal George Pell aired on the ABC's *7:30 Report* were extremely distressing for all parties, are as yet untested, and have been emphatically denied.

Allegations of criminal conduct should be met with a response that ensures all affected are treated with sensitivity and respect. Respect for all involved – accuser, accused and community – requires such allegations be investigated in a way that affords all parties natural justice.

No one is served when such due process is replaced with trial by media. It denies accusers the right to have their claims investigated in a transparent way by those whose role it is to examine such matters under the law. It denies the accused the right to respond to such claims with evidence that may be judged credible by police and prosecuting authorities. And it risks undermining any possibility of such matters being effectively investigated by police or adjudicated by the courts.

Cardinal Pell has cooperated fully with official inquiries on every occasion in which he has been asked to do so. These have included the Southwell Inquiry, the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry and the current Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, to which he has given extended testimony on three occasions. I am confident he will continue this record of assisting the search for truth in these matters.

The allegations aired on the ABC do not correspond with the George Pell I know. He has a record of leadership in the fight against child sexual abuse, and was the first Bishop in the world to implement a process under which such claims would be investigated by an independent commissioner, and where survivors could access financial and other assistance. While there has been criticism of this system, some of it fair and some of it not so fair, it nonetheless illustrates his commitment to transparency and justice in these matters.

Cardinal Pell deserves the presumption of innocence. Those who believe they have been abused deserve to be heard with respect and compassion. And the community deserves the rule of law be respected. Trial by media benefits no one.

Most Rev Anthony Fisher OP  
ARCHBISHOP OF SYDNEY