

The Australian

Apology to sex abuse victims on police chiefs' agenda

October 12, 2016

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The country's police commissioners will discuss during a meeting later this month whether to offer a historic apology to the victims of child sex abuse.

It follows rolling protests across the country, including outside the Queensland police headquarters in Brisbane yesterday, where former victims have said officers often refused to believe them when they came forward.

Victoria Police Chief Commissioner Graham Ashton, whose force established the dedicated Taskforce Sano to investigate historic and new allegations of child abuse, will take the proposal to the Australian and New Zealand Police Commissioners Forum on October 19.

Leonie Sheedy, whose Care Leavers Australasia Network has led the recent protests, said police often returned victims to their abusers without asking any questions, and on occasion became abusers themselves. "We want an apology for children not being believed. We want an apology because of the inaction," she said.

Several other forces, including Queensland and NSW, have previously written to Ms Sheedy saying an apology would be "inappropriate" before the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse finishes its work next year.

A statement from Victoria Police said the force "is committed to providing ongoing support to victims of crime. As such, Chief Commissioner Graham Ashton intends to discuss an apology to victims of institutionalised child sex abuse at the upcoming police commissioners forum."

Separately, a Victorian judge has called for the establishment of a redress scheme to support victims of abuse nationwide, as proposed by the royal commission.

Sentencing pedophile priest Robert Claffey to 18 years in prison last week, judge Felicity Hampel said the broader church had also been "culpable" in his offending. "I can only add my voice to those that hope ... (for) the establishment of ... a fully-funded adequate compensation scheme," she said.