

Rubber starting to hit the redress road

Francis Sullivan 25 May 2017

Last week in Melbourne I met with the Federal Social Services Minister Christian Porter and people from other non-government organisations to start to flesh out the process and workings of the national redress scheme for child sexual abuse survivors.

On the same day, the Minister also met with state attorneys-general to discuss the scheme as part of the seemingly uphill battle to convince all the states and territories to join in.

The rubber is now starting to hit the road on this long-awaited redress scheme. It is absolutely vital that everyone who should be at the table is there, working as hard as possible to get the scheme up and running as soon as possible.

At the meeting last Friday, the Commonwealth gave a run-down of where it is up to including the shape of the scheme and the necessity for the states in particular to be involved.

It was made very clear that unless the states cooperate, and we know that SA and WA are dragging their feet, then it will be very difficult, for a number of constitutional and legal reasons, for all institutions to also be part of the scheme.

In simple terms the Australian Constitution makes it difficult for institutions based in Western Australian, for example, to be part of the national scheme if the WA government doesn't sign up to the scheme itself.

So, if SA and WA continue to hold back then, in a worst case scenario, the entire process might collapse and abuse survivors, who are all getting older, will be left to fend for themselves as they have done for many decades already.

The Commission and the Catholic Church has been calling for a "nationally consistent approach" to redress for survivors for well over two years now.

In its Redress Report in 2015 the Commission estimated there are some 60,000 survivors of child sexual abuse in Australia and it has estimated the cost of compensating them at about \$4 billion.

Last week's meetings were an important step in getting everyone on the same page.

Each jurisdiction and individual institution must do the right thing and play their part in making amends and taking responsibility for the abuse of children that took place in their institutions.

In the same way that churches and NGOs must step up, so too must the governments who had oversight of the child based institutions, that they ran and were responsible for, in which children were abused.