

MEDIA RELEASE

Royal Commission releases criminal justice system reform recommendations including changes to religious confessions



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The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse has today released widespread recommendations on changes to the Australian criminal justice system including changes focused on information of abuse revealed in religious confessions.

The report recommends making failure to report child sexual abuse in institutions a criminal offence. This recommendation extends to information given in religious confessions. The report says clergy should not be able to refuse to report because the information was received during confession.

Francis Sullivan, CEO of the Catholic Church's Truth Justice and Healing Council said that while the Church and the TJHC have consistently argued that these reporting provisions should not apply to the confessional the Royal Commission has now made a different determination based on information and evidence it has heard over the past four years.

"The whole concept of confession in the Catholic Church is built on repentance, forgiveness and penance," Mr Sullivan said.

"If a child sex-abuser is genuinely seeking forgiveness through the sacrament of confession they will need to be prepared to do what it takes to demonstrate their repentance.

"Part of this forgiveness process, certainly in the case of a child sex-abuser, would normally require they turn themselves in to the police. In fact the priest can insist that this is done before dispensing absolution."

Mr Sullivan said that given the Commission has now made a recommendation counter to the Church's position it will now be up to parliaments to form a view and then make the relevant changes to the law.

"If ultimately there are new laws that oblige the disclosure of information heard in the Confessional, priests, like everybody else, will be expected to obey the law or suffer the consequences.

"If they do not this will be a personal, conscience decision, on the part of the priest that will have to be dealt with by the authorities in accordance with the new law as best they can," Mr Sullivan said.

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The Truth Justice and Healing Council is coordinating the Catholic Church's response to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.