

## **Actions and achievements**

Last week Stephen Crittenden, a well-respected religious commentator, challenged the Council's independence because we report to a supervisory group.

The supervisory group is made up of members from the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference and three members from Catholic Religious Australia. The role of the supervisory group and our reporting requirements are clearly explained on our website.

So, our structure and terms of reference are no secret. It is not something we seek to hide. I welcome Mr Crittenden's comments and the chance they present to explain our structure and reassure people of our freedom to provide independent, robust advice that has, and continues to be, accepted and implemented by the Church.

I was happy to have the opportunity to respond to Stephen Crittenden when I spoke with Andrew West, Radio National's presenter of the Religious and Ethics Report, on Wednesday evening, 4<sup>th</sup> September.

The Council is not structurally independent, the Church funds us, the Church employs my team and I am hired and fired by the Church. But, when the Church created the Truth Justice and Healing Council (TJHC) it acknowledged it needed advice from independent people on how to respond to the Royal Commission and how to develop better policies to protect children.

That is exactly what we are doing. I am proud and continually inspired by our Council members and of course my Chair, former Supreme Court judge and ICAC commissioner Barry O'Keefe. Our Councilors are some of Australia's most recognized independent experts across child sexual abuse, mental illness, child trauma, education and governance.

We have all put our reputations on the line to ensure the Church addresses past wrongs and provides a safe environment for children. We want to ensure the Church complies with the law, addresses victims with compassion and fairness and is transparent and accountable.

One Councilor, Professor Maria Harries, expressed her concerns to me when she was nominated as a Councilor.

After dedicating the last 45 years working with and alongside children and families who have experienced abuse by trusted people she was determined she would not let them down. She would only be part of a Council where she could carry their voices and make the Church listen and importantly act. I confidently assured her that was exactly what the Church wanted and expected from her, and why we wanted her as part of our dynamic Council.

# Blog

**TRUTH  
JUSTICE  
HEALING  
COUNCIL**

Ms Harries explained afterwards, "I have no doubt that this Council is honorable on the path of truth...As we lift the lid of silence and provide the records from the past, my prayer is we hold sacredly the pains of past hurt that heal and contribute to new ways for communities to care well for children and young people – indeed all people." (Please read her moving blog <http://www.tjhcouncil.org.au/media/36087/Taking-Sides.pdf>)

Furthermore, one of our Council members was subjected to clerical sexual abuse and three have close family members who have been abused. These people will not be sidelined or ignored.

When Archbishop Denis Hart invited me to become the CEO of the TJHC I made it very clear I would not run a spin machine. I told the Archbishop I would walk away from the position if asked to countenance past wrongs of the Church, or if I felt intimidated or restricted in any way.

Almost 12 months later I have not walked away. I am buoyed by the hard work of so many people throughout Australia to assist us in responding openly and honestly to the Royal Commission.

As a Council we have provided a range of advice to the supervisory group - from the Church's open and transparent legal approach to the Royal Commission to reforms on the way Church schools, health and welfare services protect children and promote safe environments for children.

The Council's role goes well beyond making recommendations to the Church's supervisory group. We consult, communicate and inspire the changes that will ensure world's best practice in child safety. Our job is to uncover the truth, seek justice, help with the healing of past wrongs and secure a better future.

As with so many of the things the Council says and does, I ask that we be judged by our actions and achievements.

Francis Sullivan

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