

CLOSING REMARKS

I THANK COMMISSIONER CUNEEN AND MEMBERS OF THE SPECIAL COMMISSION FOR GIVING ME AN OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE A PREPARED STATEMENT AS I CONCLUDE MY PUBLIC EVIDENCE. I ALSO COMMEND THE COMMISSION FOR CONDUCTING A THOROUGH AND WIDE-RANGING INQUIRY.

MY 17 YEARS AS BISHOP OF THE DIOCESE OF MAITLAND-NEWCASTLE SAW A GRADUAL AWAKENING IN ME TO THE HORROR OF SEXUAL ABUSE IN THE CHURCH. DURING THOSE YEARS THE DIOCESE MOVED FROM SHOCK AND DISBELIEF TO AN ANGRY REJECTION OF SUCH CRIMINAL BEHAVIOUR OF SOME CLERGY AND CHURCH PERSONNEL.

ANY ORGANISATION RUNS THE RISK OF BECOMING A COLD AND INDIFFERENT BEAURACRACY AND THAT INCLUDES THE CATHOLIC CHURCH. IN SUCH A BEAURACRACY ITS LEADERS CAN SPEND MORE TIME PROTECTING THE ORGANISATION THAN LOVINGLY SERVING THE FAITHFUL MEN AND WOMEN WHO CONSTITUTE IT.

WHEN THIS HAPPENS VULNERABLE CHILDREN AND ADULTS CAN FALL THROUGH THE CRACKS. THEIR DEEP NEEDS REMAIN UNMET AND, AS WE HAVE FOUND, EVEN CRIMINALLY EXPLOITED.

CONSTANT VIGILANCE AND AUTHENTIC ACCOUNTABILITY CAN MITIGATE THE TENDENCY TO EXPLOIT. CHURCH LEADERS, MOST OF WHOM ARE WONDERFUL COMMITTED PEOPLE, MUST BE TRANSPARENT, AND PUT-IN-PLACE PROCESSES AND PROCEDURES WHICH GENUINELY PROTECT THE YOUNG AND VULNERABLE.

FORTUNATELY, HERE IN THE DIOCESE WE SAW THE NEED TO DO JUST THAT AND PUT IN PLACE AN EFFECTIVE CHILD PROTECTION UNIT NOW KNOWN AS ZIMMERMAN SERVICES. SINCE 2005 THE DIOCESE, THROUGH THIS UNIT, HAS ATTEMPTED TO REDRESS PAST FAILURES AND NEGLECT BY OFFERING EFFECTIVE TRAINING OF CHURCH PERSONNEL, PROMPT ATTENTION TO CASES OF ABUSE, SUPPORT FOR VICTIMS, AND HEALING FOR FRACTURED FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES.

IT WILL PROBABLY TAKE SOME YEARS TO REBUILD LOST CONFIDENCE IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH. HEALING AND RECONCILIATION CAN COME ABOUT WHEN PEOPLE SEE THAT THINGS ARE DIFFERENT AND THAT THEIR GENUINE NEEDS ARE MET IN AN OPEN AND COMPASSIONATE WAY. I PRAY DAILY FOR THE VICTIMS OF SEXUAL ABUSE ASKING GOD TO GRANT THEM PEACE OF MIND, HEALING AND RECONCILIATION WITH ALL PEOPLE AND INCLUDING THE CATHOLIC CHURCH.

BISHOP BILL WRIGHT, THE CURRENT BISHOP OF MAITLAND-NEWCASTLE, MADE A HEARTFELT APOLOGY AT THE OPENING OF PHASE TWO OF THIS INQUIRY. I WELCOME HIS APOLOGY AND ADD MY OWN SINCERE SORROW THAT ANY ACTIONS OF MINE MAY HAVE ADDED TO THE PAIN OF VICTIMS AND THEIR FAMILIES. THIS INCLUDES A FLIPPANT COMMENT OF MINE LATE LAST WEEK WHEN I SPOKE OF NOT DESTROYING SECRET DOCUMENTS – MY WORDS THEN WERE INSENSITIVE AND I APOLOGISE.

THE EVILS OF SEXUAL ABUSE SHOULD NEVER HAVE HAPPENED, BUT THEY DID. WITH BETTER SYSTEMS IN PLACE MAY THEY NEVER HAPPEN AGAIN.

THANK YOU COMMISSIONER