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Australia

Opening Comments for Media Conference on the Release of the Royal Commission's Final Report

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to child sexual abuse has today released its final report which includes more than 180 recommendations, many of which will have significant impact on the way the Catholic Church operates in Australia.

I firstly want to acknowledge and thank Justice Peter McClellan, his fellow commissioners and all those who worked for and supported the Royal Commission over the past 5 years. They have facilitated a process which has provided an opportunity for thousands of survivors of childhood sexual abuse to tell their story. It is a credit to the Commissioners and their staff that every survivor was treated with care and dignity.

They have undertaken a very important and necessary responsibility on behalf of the nation and we all hope that their efforts will ensure a much safer future for our children.

The release of the final report is the culmination of almost five years of intense examination of the way in which many different institutions including the Catholic Church have historically failed children.

This is a shameful past, in which a prevailing culture of secrecy and self-protection led to unnecessary suffering for many victims and their families.

Once again I reiterate on behalf of the Bishops and religious leaders of the Catholic Church our unconditional apology for this suffering and a commitment to ensuring justice for those affected.

Together with the religious orders across Australia we are committed to continuing the work of recent years to ensure a future in which the safety and protection of children and vulnerable adults is paramount.

We acknowledge the courage of all those survivors who have come forward to the Royal Commission. We will be taking very seriously the Royal Commission's report and have commissioned an initial assessment of its findings by the Truth Justice and Healing Council. We expect the TJHC assessment to be completed early in 2018.

The Church will continue to push for the introduction of a national redress scheme for the survivors of child sexual abuse in which the Church will participate.

The success of this scheme lies with the cooperation of the state governments. Without their involvement national coverage will be impossible. It is now time for state governments to act.

Central to this Royal Commission is the painful truth that so many children were abused, trust was destroyed and innocence lost. They are sons and daughters, brothers and sisters – this should never have happened.

As a bishop I express my deepest sorrow.

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ARCHBISHOP OF MELBOURNE
15 December 2017