



# Statement

**The Hon Ted Baillieu MP**

Premier  
Minister for the Arts

**The Hon Robert Clark MP**

Attorney-General  
Minister for Finance

Tuesday 17 April 2012

## **Inquiry into handling of child abuse by religious and other organisations**

The Victorian Coalition Government today announced the establishment of a Parliamentary inquiry into matters relating to the handling of alleged criminal abuse of children by religious and other organisations.

The inquiry will have broad terms of reference to consider the practices, policies and protocols of religious and other non-government organisations for the handling of allegations of criminal abuse of children by personnel within their organisations.

The inquiry will also have the power to assess any measures put in place to respond to alleged abuse and to make any necessary recommendations for changes to the law or to relevant policies and practices.

A focus of the inquiry will be on identifying reforms that can and should be put in place to better protect children and ensure that instances of abuse are responded to properly and effectively. In doing so, the inquiry will have the power to consider evidence of past policies, practices and abuse.

The Government has decided to establish the inquiry after giving careful consideration to the report and recommendations of the Cummins Inquiry and to the material put before it by many individuals and groups.

It is clear that there have been a substantial number of established complaints of sexual abuse of children by those who have taken advantage of positions of authority. This abuse has had traumatic consequences for victims and their families.

While the investigation and prosecution of individual cases of abuse are matters for the police and the courts, the broader and systemic implications of this abuse need to be investigated to ensure that everything possible is done to protect children.

The inquiry will be conducted by the bipartisan Family and Community Development Committee of Parliament. It will have powers to compel witnesses to attend and give evidence and to summons documents necessary for its deliberations.

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All evidence and proceedings will be subject to Parliamentary privilege, and the inquiry will be able to take evidence in private hearings where it considers it appropriate in the interests of victims or for other reasons.

The Government has concluded that a Parliamentary inquiry is the most appropriate form for the inquiry to take. A Parliamentary inquiry will be able to proceed in a less formal and legalistic manner than a Royal Commission, and with no expectation that persons giving evidence will be required to have legal representation.

The Government extends its appreciation to the many individuals and organisations who have contacted the Government and provided accounts of their experiences. The Government also welcomes recent commitments by senior church figures to co-operate with an inquiry.

The terms of reference for the inquiry were approved by the Governor in Council earlier today and are set out below.

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**TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Family and Community Development Committee is requested to inquire into, consider and report to the Parliament on the processes by which religious and other non-government organisations respond to the criminal abuse of children by personnel within their organisations, including:

1. the practices, policies and protocols in such organisations for the handling of allegations of criminal abuse of children, including measures put in place by various organisations in response to concerns about such abuse within the organisation or the potential for such abuse to occur;
2. whether there are systemic practices in such organisations that operate to preclude or discourage the reporting of suspected criminal abuse of children to State authorities; and
3. whether changes to law or to practices, policies and protocols in such organisations are required to help prevent criminal abuse of children by personnel in such organisations and to deal with allegations of such abuse.

In undertaking the inquiry, the Committee should be mindful of not encroaching upon the responsibilities of investigatory agencies or the courts in relation to particular cases or prejudicing the conduct or outcome of investigations or court proceedings.

The Committee is requested to report to the Parliament no later than 30 April 2013.