



Speech By
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**NATIONAL REDRESS SCHEME FOR INSTITUTIONAL CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE
(COMMONWEALTH POWERS) BILL**

 **Dr ROWAN** (Moggill—LNP) (2.36 pm): I rise as the Liberal National Party's shadow minister for communities to make a contribution to the National Redress Scheme for Institutional Child Sexual Abuse (Commonwealth Powers) Bill 2018. Much has been said in this House this week about protecting the most vulnerable in our society, our children, and doing all we can to ensure safe communities. Indeed, just yesterday, when talking to the Police Powers and Responsibilities and Other Legislation Amendment Bill, I stated—

As elected representatives and as legislators, our responsibility, first and foremost, in this parliament should be to ensure safe and prosperous communities and, as such, deliver a safe and cohesive Queensland.

As the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse has made painfully clear, for far too long a significant number of children were let down by many of our key institutions, including government institutions, and child victims were robbed of the chance to grow up in a safe and prosperous community.

I have to say that personally I have been shocked and dismayed as to what has occurred in many government and non-government institutions over many years. The failed governance processes and failed timely responsiveness to either child sexual abuse allegations and/or proven offences has been deeply disturbing. In the 1970s as a child I remember being driven by my parents past a particular boys home in the western suburbs. Having read as part of the royal commission inquiry some of the incidents and abuse that took place there, I feel deep sorrow and hurt for those victims.

As members in this House also know, I am a specialist physician who has treated those with many drug and alcohol problems. There is no doubt that children who have suffered with childhood abuse and neglect are likely, unfortunately, to develop substance dependency problems, and I have certainly seen that in my professional experience.

The sexual abuse of a child is an unthinkable, horrific crime. It is a crime perpetrated on the most vulnerable in our society at a time when they must rely on the trust and support of those around them to help guide and nurture them through life. It is, quite simply, a fundamental breach of trust. In November 2012 former prime minister Julia Gillard announced her intention to establish a royal commission into institutional responses to child abuse. As many in this House will recall, at that time a growing number of allegations concerning child sexual abuse in institutions continued to be raised, leading to the formation of the royal commission. As the then prime minister said regarding those allegations and revelations—

The individuals concerned deserve the most thorough of investigations into the wrongs that have been committed against them. They deserve to have their voices heard and their claims investigated.

No-one in good conscience could dispute that. I commend former prime minister Gillard for instigating this royal commission.

Over the course of nearly five years, the royal commission analysed the experiences of close to 6,900 survivors who bravely spoke to the commission in private sessions. Some of the statistics from those personal accounts made for harrowing reading. The majority of survivors—64 per cent—were male. More than half of the survivors told the commission that they were aged between 10 and 14 years of age when they were first sexually abused. More than 14 per cent of survivors were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. More than four per cent of survivors said they had a disability at the time of the abuse. Nearly 94 per cent of survivors said they were abused by a male. Nearly 84 per cent of survivors said they were abused by an adult. More than a third of survivors said they were abused by multiple perpetrators. The average duration of child sexual abuse experienced in institutions was 2.2 years.

What is more, the commission found that there was a wide range of institutions—public, private and religious—where this sexual abuse occurred, including: child-care services; schools, including religious schools; health and allied services; youth detention; historical residential care; contemporary out-of-home care; religious institutions; family and youth support services; sporting, recreation and other clubs; youth employment; and the armed forces.

Understandably, with such findings by the royal commission and three reports, a number of recommendations have subsequently been made. We are here today to specifically implement the findings stemming from the royal commission's *Redress and civil litigation report* released in September 2015. This report recommended the establishment of a single national redress scheme to provide eligible applicants with four elements of redress: firstly, a monetary payment; secondly, access to counselling; thirdly, psychological care; and, finally, a direct personal response from responsible institutions.

With the federal government establishing the National Redress Scheme for Institutional Child Sexual Abuse built on those elements I just described, it is now time for Queensland to opt in and finally enable survivors of institutional child sexual abuse to access the redress they so rightly deserve. For Queensland, what that entails is a commitment of \$500 million for the purpose of providing redress payments to people who experienced child sexual abuse in institutions run by the Queensland government. Current modelling has indicated that some 10,000 redress applications may relate to abuse in Queensland institutions—half of which are estimated to be from government operated institutions.

The significance of joining this national redress scheme and the importance it holds for survivors of this abuse cannot be overstated. No amount of redress can ever compensate for the hurt and suffering inflicted on those innocent Queenslanders, but it is a beginning. The importance of this scheme is about giving a voice to those who had theirs taken away. It is about Queenslanders who were once children and teenagers who have for far too long had to suffer and survive in silence to be silenced no more.

With the royal commission and this national redress scheme and the passing of this bill today, all of us in this chamber are acutely aware of just how paramount it is that we do all that we can to protect and provide safe environments and communities for all children into the future, because children are our future and there should be absolutely no-one or nothing in their way preventing them from reaching their full potential to innocently grow up as kids—although the term 'full potential' is really a misnomer, as potential is never actual.

The final report into institutional responses to child sexual abuse aptly put it when it stated—

Although, inevitably, the Royal Commission has looked at past events, it is important that the momentum for change initiated by the Royal Commission's work is not lost and that lasting changes to protect children are implemented.

Today we make significant inroads into ensuring that the good work done by the royal commission is not lost, but we cannot end here. It is incumbent upon all members of this parliament, on all of us, to ensure that we continue to promote safe and harmonious communities and institutions—communities and institutions which have no place or tolerance for such horrific abuse.

In closing, I would like to thank the royal commission and place on the parliamentary record my sincere appreciation to the work they did during its extensive investigations and hearings. I would also like to particularly acknowledge the many thousands of survivors and witnesses and thank them for bravely coming forward and making sure that their experiences were known—experiences which ultimately helped shape the recommendations and outcomes we see today. I commend the bill to the House.