




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR BONNEY

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

 **Mr O'CONNOR** (Bonney—LNP) (4.00 pm): I appreciate the opportunity to make a contribution on the National Redress Scheme for Institutional Child Sexual Abuse (Commonwealth Powers) Bill. We have all seen the horrors reported during the royal commission that have led to these laws. The stories there will stay with fair-minded Australians for many years to come. This is a great day for the survivors of these horrible circumstances, but it is not good enough that they had to wait for so long. They will finally be able to access counselling, an apology from the institution involved and a monetary payment which will be in line with the national cap of \$150,000.

Two stories from my city, the Gold Coast, have stood out in particular. These were revealed in the royal commission's private sessions and are available on their website. They provide a clear picture of the tragic circumstances that have led to this redress scheme.

Darlene, not her real name, was sexually abused by three different priests at a Gold Coast Catholic school. The third raped her when she went to him to report the other two. I will not go into the details today, but they are nothing short of horrific. She said in her report to the commission that the scars that have been left on her from that time have shaped every part of her life. She struggled in her working life and in handling a committed relationship. She was diagnosed with PTSD and considered suicide more than once. Decades later she engaged with the church but hated the experience and considered the compensation pitiful compared to the suffering she had gone through. When a final offer was made she was told she had only hours to accept it and that if she did not she could take it to court and see how far she got. We are passing these laws today to ensure this sort of unacceptable situation never occurs again.

The second story is about Bobbie—a young girl requiring 24/7 care. She was the epitome of a vulnerable person that needed protection and care and yet it was her carer from the now defunct organisation FSG who sexually assaulted her. Even after police substantiated the report no prosecution was made and FSG covered up the matter, falsifying evidence and not even terminating the employment of that carer.

Over and over the stories of abuse like this are shocking and yet what is often more shocking is the lack of response or steps taken against the victim. It is good to see the government joining every other state and territory to provide much needed support to survivors. However, it should not have taken so long to get here.

There is expected to be 5,000 Queenslanders eligible, with the potential for another 5,000 who endured abuse in privately run institutions. Hopefully through the passage of this legislation we will see more survivors come forward to receive assistance for what they went through. I note the Premier said the delay in Queensland signing up to the scheme was due to complications surrounding a previous redress scheme. This is about the response to what these victims have had to deal with and it is a shame they have been left in the lurch.

I would like to recognise Bravehearts, based in my electorate at Arundel. They have been supporting victims for many years through the royal commission process, preparing them for hearings and providing child safety training for many other organisations to ensure they are reporting any complaints properly to protect children. I am proud to represent them and praise their efforts at giving a voice to those who are often not able to speak for themselves.

In conclusion, today we are making amends for what has happened in the past. I would like to end by talking about how this can all be prevented from ever occurring in the first place. I recently attended the launch of the *Brave Little Bear* book series at Labrador Community Hub. They were written by Xenia Schembri, a local woman.