



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

Update on provision of investigation report to Western Australia Police

MEDIA STATEMENT

September 22, 2023

Clarifications regarding the Church's internal investigation into Bishop Christopher Saunders, retired Bishop of Broome

The Vatican initially entrusted the Church's internal investigation of allegations against Bishop Saunders to Bishop Bill Wright of Maitland-Newcastle, the then-Chair of the Bishops Commission for Professional Standards and Safeguarding.

Upon the death of Bishop Wright, the Vatican turned to the then-President of the Bishops Conference, Brisbane Archbishop Mark Coleridge. His brief was to oversee the process according to the norms of *Vos Estis Lux Mundi*, ensuring its integrity and its independence from local Church authorities in Western Australia.

"The Church could commence its internal investigation only once it was formally notified by WA Police that they had closed their investigations, which took a long time," said Archbishop Coleridge.

"The Church can confirm that Bishop Saunders refused to leave the Diocese and chose not to participate in the Church's investigation within the deadline of six months initially stipulated by the Vatican.

"The investigation by the Church included both alleged canonical crimes, as defined by *Vos Estis Lux Mundi*, and alleged breaches of the Church's *Integrity in Ministry* protocols."

On August 28, 2021, the Vatican appointed Geraldton Bishop Michael Morrissey as the Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Broome following the Pope's acceptance of the resignation of Bishop Saunders.

"The Church understands and takes seriously its mandatory reporting obligations under Western Australian law. It's important to note that the list of alleged victims and potential victims was already held by WA Police based on their own investigations," said Bishop Morrissey.

"Despite allegations to the contrary, the Church has not breached the Children and Community Services Act 2004, which applies only to children. Mandatory reporting obligations under the Act only apply to a child under the age of 18. Further enquiries were made after the report was submitted and no potential victims in the report were confirmed or identified as being under the age of 18."

The Church has handed the report to WA Deputy Commissioner of Police, Allan Adams, and the Church and Police remain in ongoing and collaborative contact on the matter.

"The Church will continue to offer full transparency and cooperation with WA Police. The Church encourages anyone who has experienced abuse, or suspects abuse within the community, to come forward and report it to police," said Bishop Morrissey.

Other points of clarification

- At no point did the Church oppose the provision of the report to WA Police. To portray the discussions as in any way adversarial is false. After a request was made by WA Police to the Church on Tuesday, September 19, a positive response was immediately offered, with the report provided directly to the Deputy Commissioner of Police on Thursday, September 21.
- The Church's internal investigation into Bishop Saunders under *Vos Estis Lux Mundi* is ongoing.