



## AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

### **New national office will streamline, coordinate safeguarding efforts**

**Media Release**

**June 29, 2020**

Australian Catholic Bishops Conference president Archbishop Mark Coleridge says a new national office for safeguarding will streamline and coordinate the Church's work to protect children and vulnerable adults.

"The Catholic Church in Australia is bringing into a single entity several national agencies working in the area of child protection and safeguarding," he said.

"This has been intended since 2016, when Catholic Professional Standards Limited was established."

The work of Catholic Professional Standards Limited (CPSL) has been pivotal to the Church's progress in the past four years, in the final stages of and beyond the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, Archbishop Coleridge said.

"For all its excellent work in developing the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards, beginning the audits of dioceses and religious institutes, and training Catholic leaders, CPSL has not become the single national office envisaged," Archbishop Coleridge said.

"That the Church is looking to achieve its goal of a single national entity does not and cannot diminish the work currently being done."

The various national agencies that now exist alongside CPSL include the Australian Catholic Centre for Professional Standards (formerly the National Committee for Professional Standards), the Implementation Advisory Group and Australian Catholic Redress Limited, which facilitates diocesan engagement with the National Redress Scheme.

"We didn't plan such a disjointed national approach to safeguarding and professional standards beyond the Royal Commission. But different entities emerged as the need arose – without too much thought for coordination," Archbishop Coleridge said.

The proliferation of Catholic entities has come at a time when various state, territory and Commonwealth bodies have also been established, adding regulation and risking still more duplication.

Archbishop Coleridge said it was "seriously mistaken" to see the decision to bring various national organisations into a single entity as a diminishment in the Church's commitment to child protection and safeguarding.

"For more than 18 months, guided by some of the leading authorities in child safety in the Church and elsewhere, we've been moving towards the single national office that's long been intended," he said.

"Two earlier reviews and the work of the current expert group have been done in conversation with all key professional standards and safeguarding organisations, including Catholic Professional Standards Limited."

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In a statement on June 1, CPSL's board said it "anticipates being engaged in the planning for the new entity and until decisions as to the work of the new entity and transition plans are clear, CPSL will continue with its current work".

Archbishop Coleridge said the new national office will assume key functions of CPSL and will supervise independent audits of Church institutions, the training of Catholic leaders and the development and review of national standards.

It will also incorporate functions currently entrusted to other national organisations, including the oversight of a new national protocol for handling complaints of sexual abuse.

"The new office will retain the operational independence that Catholic Professional Standards Limited has enjoyed," Archbishop Coleridge said.

"We are confident this national entity can deliver on our commitment to the safety of children and vulnerable adults while also eliminating duplication and reducing costs at a time when all Church institutions are under financial pressure."