

MEDIA RELEASE



Ballarat Bishop to stand in as defendant in historic child sexual abuse civil claims

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Abuse survivors in Ballarat have welcomed Ballarat Bishop Paul Bird's decision to make himself available as a defendant in historic child sex abuse civil claims.

Bishop Bird, along with a number of other senior Church leaders including Archbishop Fisher in Sydney and Archbishop Coleridge in Brisbane, have now publically endorsed the new policy which requires a Church organisation facing a civil claim of child sexual abuse to help identify an entity to sue.

Francis Sullivan, CEO of Catholic Church's Truth Justice and Healing Council said the very public declaration by Bishop Bird that he will stand in as the defendant in a number of potential historic child sexual abuse civil claims is welcome news.

"This is entirely consistent with reform recommendations made by the Truth Justice and Healing Council to Church leaders in 2014. What the change means is that if an abuse survivor wants to go to court then the first hurdle of finding someone to sue has now been removed.

"What we are seeing here in Ballarat is a Bishop take a leading role in assisting survivors engage in the legal process. This is a major turnaround from what has previously been the case.

"This is the sort of action that will, over time go some way to restoring the credibility and trust in the Catholic Church."

Bishop Bird said: "I've inherited the history of the community, for good and for ill, and therefore should be ready to address that history in so far as it needs to be addressed."

Local survivor and advocate Mr Peter Blenkiron said the decision was a 'shining light'.

"I hold this hope very dearly that Ballarat will lead the way for all of Australia," he said.

The third part of the Ballarat hearing starts on Monday, 22 February 2016.

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The Truth Justice and Healing Council is coordinating the Catholic Church's engagement with the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

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