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## Summary statement – Bishop Bird

29 April 2013

Bishop Paul Bird  
*Bishop of Ballarat*

Since becoming Bishop of Ballarat six months ago, I have met a good number of people in Ballarat and in many of the parishes throughout the western part of Victoria in the Ballarat diocese. I have been greatly encouraged by the warm welcome I have received and by the good will of the communities in each place.

I have also been saddened to hear of the great distress caused to so many people by the abuse of children – distress to the victims themselves, to their families, to the people of the parishes where abuse occurred and to the wider community that has been shocked by such crimes.

On behalf of the diocese of Ballarat I apologise to those who have been abused, their families and their local communities. I am deeply sorry for the distress that these crimes have brought upon our whole community. I apologise for the mistakes that have been made in responding to these offences and the failure to take effective measures to ensure the safety of children.

From the time *Towards Healing* came into effect in 1997, the diocese of Ballarat has followed its procedures in responding to complaints of child abuse.

### **Numbers of complaints and offenders**

Since 1975, the diocese has received a total of 116 complaints, of which 109 have been upheld. Sixty-seven have been against Ridsdale. That is, over 60% of the complaints were against this one offender.

There have been no reported cases of abuse by priests in the diocese that have occurred since 1992.

### **Assistance through Victims Support Group**

As Bishop I support “Moving Towards Justice”, a group set up to support victims and families who have been injured as a result of abuse. Since becoming bishop I have met twice with representatives of this group to encourage them and to discuss how the diocese of Ballarat might be able to assist them with moral and financial support. For example, the group is establishing a list of professional counsellors who could make services available in referred cases. The diocese of Ballarat will contribute to the cost of such counselling.

As well as responding to those who have suffered abuse in the past, we have a responsibility to ensure the safety of children now and in the future.

For example, all priests who undertake public ministry have a current Working with Children Check, with details held by the diocese. Parishes maintain a register of the Working with Children Check details of employees and volunteers. We have also introduced codes of conduct that protect children.

All the documents from the diocesan files relating to complaints of child abuse have been forwarded to the Inquiry.

I am grateful for the opportunity which this Parliamentary Inquiry has provided to victims of abuse to tell their story and to the Church to account for both its failures and the steps it has taken to address abuse.

There have been some terrible abuses of trust among those charged with the care of children. There have also been some tragic failures among those responsible for overseeing the care of children in the Church. I hope we can learn from this painful history and ensure for the future that our ministry is truly what Christian ministry should be: a service that follows the lead of Christ himself, showing respect and care for all.