



**The Hon. Christian Porter MP**  
Minister for Social Services

**TRANSCRIPT**  
**Doorstop**  
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E&OE

**Subjects: Commonwealth Redress Scheme**

**MINISTER PORTER:**

We've conducted two very important meetings this morning.

First was a meeting I attended on behalf of the Commonwealth with all of the heads of the major charities and church organisations who potentially could be opting in to the Commonwealth National Redress scheme for survivors of sexual abuse in institutional settings.

The second meeting was a meeting of all the state and territory Attorney-Generals. Again, briefing to have opt-in for each of those jurisdictions.

In each of those meetings there was a large amount of good faith, and very positive contribution to working on a path forward to maximise the opt-in for states and territories, and churches and charities.

And particularly today it was about trying to identify potential impediments that could be overcome to maximise the opt-in from all of these jurisdictions – state and territories and churches and charities.

We very much narrowed the issues today, and the progress I think was very substantial and it's quite clear that there's a path forward to ensuring that this scheme can start in the middle of next year, to take applications with a considerable amount of op-in from both non-government organisations – churches and charities – but also other jurisdictions – states and territories – around Australia.

**QUESTION:**

Have any states and territories flagged any concerns or barriers to signing up?

**MINISTER PORTER:**

There are differences of opinions on a number of issues.

Some of them are minor issues of procedural process, some of them on more substantial issues.

But even with respect to the areas where there is some level of disagreement, it's clear, I think, after today's meeting that there's enough goodwill and good faith in the room that we're able to negotiate a path through those.

What we have agreed today is to meet again, as a group, after the exchange of correspondence which narrows some complicated issues – so I think that today was incredibly positive, I'd like to thank all of the state and territory jurisdictions and their Attorney-Generals for their input.

Everything that was said today was constructive and about trying to determine a path forward to maximise the opt-in of all the jurisdictions.

**QUESTION:**

What is the deadline for getting Attorneys-General to sign up?

**MINISTER PORTER:**

Well, the deadline isn't absolutely hard and fast, and we want to accommodate all jurisdictions.

The fact is that the Commonwealth will be proceeding next year, and any organisation – a church or a charity – could actually join after the commencement and they've seen the initial operation. We, of course, would prefer to have as many churches, as many charitable bodies, as many Australian jurisdictions, join ready for the start-up, but we have got some flexibility for them.

We are actually looking to have draft legislation available for discussion for all of these important jurisdictions and organisations in or about July or August, and the input that we receive from these organisations and jurisdictions today helps us draft that legislation in a way to maximise the opt-in to the scheme.

**QUESTION:**

Are there any groups of jurisdictions that have said today that they will not sign up?

**MINISTER PORTER:**

No, and that was an important feature of today. Some states have been on the record previously, and they are in a challenging set of circumstances where they, themselves have already run a variety and form of redress as a state-based scheme.

But no jurisdiction evidenced any ruling out of the ability, or want, to opt-in to what the Commonwealth is proposing.

Each of them have offered up views and suggestions, and nominated challenges – but these are things that I think based on goodwill and good faith of today’s discussions, can be worked through and that a path forward can be devised to a range of jurisdictions to join in.

**QUESTION:**

When do you meet again with these groups?

**MINISTER PORTER:**

Well, we discussed today having a meeting before the next scheduled meeting of this law standing committee, so that will be determined, but we are looking at a stand-alone meeting between the state Attorney-Generals and myself on this issue to further refine some of the points of contention and some of the suggestions that have offered up today.

**QUESTION:**

It’s perhaps a tricky question to answer, but when do you think the first abuse victims may receive funds from the National Redress Scheme?

**MINISTER PORTER:**

I can’t say that with certainty, but what I can say is that we are aiming to have a scheme operational that receives applications in July of next year.

So I am fully expecting that the Commonwealth Scheme will be up and operating, by sense that is able to take applications, next year – in July next year.

**QUESTION:**

Presumably you’ll need more than \$33 million. Why wasn’t more money allocated in the Federal Budget?

**MINISTER PORTER:**

So the \$33 million establishes, on behalf of the Commonwealth, all of the upfront administration and bureaucratic and organisational costs to establish redress.

It is of course the fact that we will be allocating further monies, which actually represent the Commonwealth’s share of the financial payments of redress. Those amounts won’t actually be published in Budget documents, as is traditionally the case with redress schemes, but they will be fully budgeted for.

This money, this initial \$30 plus million, was to establish the bureaucracy, the organisation, the administration we need to ensure that we can actually start taking applications in July next year.

**QUESTION:**

And how much money do you think governments are eventually going to have to find for these victims?

**MINISTER PORTER:**

Well it will be considerable. The Royal Commission itself estimated a potential cost of all the redress payments of about \$4 billion – but that is of course is over the long ten year period.

The Commonwealth will have a share of that, all the states and territories will have a share or that, of course the institutions themselves – the Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, the Salvation Army – are all going to have a share of that. But it is a substantial sum, but we the Commonwealth have certainly started to make provisions for our share of that, as I'm sure all of the states and territories and organisations have.

But today, in essence, was about trying to work through different points of view on what are not insubstantial complexities, in process, in how we assess claims, in how costs are shared.

There was a lot of good will and a lot of good faith and a lot of very constructive input that says to me that we will be able to construct a path forward which will maximise the opt-in from states, from territories and churches and charities.

From here on in we will be going and meeting one-on-one with each of the churches and charities we met with in a group today, and as I said, the state and territory Attorney-Generals and myself will again be meeting for a standalone meeting on this issue in the not too distant future.

**QUESTION:**

What's your expectation of groups like churches, wealthy bodies like the Catholic Church, what's your expectation on those groups and how much money they chip in for compensation?

**MINISTER PORTER:**

Well, the system that we're proposing is that every individual application will be assessed on a low-process, low-evidentiary basis, on the basis of the reasonable likelihood that the events occurred.

We will then assess them according to an agreed matrix of assessments and their final redress payment will be determined.

What we are doing is following the Royal Commission's recommendation that this is a responsible entity-pays scheme. So when the final amounts of a redress payment has been determined, if the Commonwealth is the responsible entity than it pays for that persons redress. If it were a state or jurisdiction, they themselves pay, or if it were an organisation such as a church, they pay.

So it is not possible yet to break that down, but it's very important to note that we are following the Royal Commission recommendation that this will be a responsible entity-pays for redress scheme.

**QUESTION:**

Is there any, in your view, any reason why states and territories wouldn't just sign up sooner rather than later? Would you like to see them sign up by midyear, or later in the year?

**MINISTER PORTER:**

I'm not going to put a timeframe on that precisely, and I've said that we're going to start taking applications in July of next year. But what I want to do is make sure that all the states and territories have every opportunity to assist us in the drafting of the legislation for the scheme in a way that maximises the potential for them to opt-in.

As I noted today, many of the suggestions were incredibly constructive, we certainly narrowed the issues that were points of contention on how the scheme would operate. You'll appreciate that across jurisdictions, with governments with non-government organisations; there is an immense amount of complexity here. It's an enterprise, the scale of which has rarely been seen in Australian public policy before – so it's not without its complications, but we can work through those.

**QUESTION:**

Can I just ask a question about the probe that you've announced into funding UFO enthusiasts groups. Can you just explain that for me?

**MINISTER PORTER:**

Well there was one group – there were 2700 groups who benefitted through Commonwealth Grants to volunteer organisations. The grants are modest, between \$1000-\$5000, but they help organisations who are volunteer organisations providing services to their members and their community. It came to light that one of the organisations that might otherwise receive a grant was an organisation that, I understand, is established for sighting unidentified flying objects. Now I must say, you expect many things as a Minister; I haven't expected that a group like that would receive a grant like this. I asked that the transmission of the funds be stopped so that I could have a closer look and the Department could report to me on the basis of their first decision.

My instinct on it is that it probably doesn't pass the common sense test. But I will have a close look at it – I'm sure they're all very good people, I'm sure that they're all volunteering in a way that's constructive for them, but I'm just not entirely sure that this meets the common sense test.

**QUESTION:**

It was originally funded by the Labor Government in 2013, do you think that the funding should have been more regulated [INAUDIBLE]?

**MINISTER PORTER:**

These are decisions that are made at a departmental level to ensure that there's not a lot of political decision making in terms of which volunteer organisations get which grants. And that is a sensible system.

So yes, they were previously funded in 2013 when Labor was in government, but that is not to say it was Labor's decision, it was a departmental decision. Again it was a departmental decision – it's come to light, I've now focused a little bit of attention on that departmental decision, I'll be giving it a little more scrutiny. But again, my instinctive sense is that it doesn't quite pass the common sense test.

Thanks all.

(ENDS)