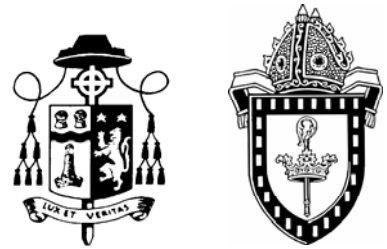


Media Release

For Immediate Release
Friday, June 29, 2007



Joint Statement from the Right Reverend Graeme Rutherford, Assistant Bishop of Newcastle and the Most Reverend Michael Malone, Bishop of Maitland-Newcastle on the Federal Government's Emergency Response in the Northern Territory

Concerns about the safety and wellbeing of Indigenous children in the Northern Territory, and the Federal Government's response to the issue, have received a great deal of media coverage in recent days.

Throughout the European history of our nation, policies and practices towards Indigenous Australians have not always been just or wise. This is true of churches as well as government bodies.

The immediate response to the distressing findings of the *Little Children Are Sacred* report is commendable. However, well-intentioned as they undoubtedly are, these responses must also be appropriate, respectful of individuals, local communities and cultures, sustained, adequately resourced and fully consultative.

We applaud, and support all sincere efforts to address the tragic circumstances in which so many innocent children are living in the Northern Territory. We endorse the open letter sent earlier this week to the Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, signed by a number of welfare, community and church groups. We support the call for a long term plan to address the underlying causes of the problem, including community breakdown, alcohol and substance abuse, joblessness, overcrowding, the oppression of Aboriginal culture and low levels of education.

We urge the government to address the abuse and neglect of Aboriginal children in the Northern Territory and to assist those affected by it. However we call for this response to be considered, lasting and sensitive to Aboriginal culture. In these supposedly more enlightened times, it is crucial that past practices of paternalism or prejudice not be repeated.

We encourage both the Australian and Northern Territory Governments to work with Indigenous peoples in identifying the solutions to ensure that any outcomes are sustainable in the longer term. The stakes are high, and protecting our children is of paramount importance. There are many potentially adverse consequences of implementing a quick response to a complex social problem without wide-spread consultation with the communities, their leaders and practitioners who can provide professional advice and guidance.

When we take seriously our responsibility to protect our children from all forms of abuse, and when we recognise the value of all cultures, it is not only the children who benefit. We, as individuals, and the community as a whole gain from our efforts to see the world from other perspectives, and the adults of tomorrow are given the best foundation on which to build socially responsible lives.

Handwritten signature of Michael Malone, Bishop of Maitland-Newcastle.

Most Reverend Michael Malone
Bishop of Maitland-Newcastle

Handwritten signature of Graeme Rutherford, Assistant Bishop of Newcastle.

Right Reverend Graeme Rutherford
Assistant Bishop of Newcastle

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**Released on behalf of the Catholic Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle
and the Anglican Diocese of Newcastle**