

## - MEDIA RELEASE -

### **Audit shows key safeguarding requirements being met in Catholic Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle**

**28 February 2024**

A safeguarding audit report of the Catholic Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle published today by Australian Catholic Safeguarding Ltd (ACSL) has found the Diocese is meeting key safeguarding requirements.

The audit assessed implementation of the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards (NCSS), covering measures in place to safeguard children and adults at risk from abuse.

The Diocese receive a compliance score of 98 per cent, meaning that all but 2 per cent of the safeguarding indicators applicable to its operations have either been fully embedded or substantially progressed at the time of the audit, which was completed between September and December 2023.

The Diocese was jointly audited by ACSL and Prolegis Lawyers, a specialist charity and not-for-profit law firm.

ACSL CEO Dr Ursula Stephens said that it is a pleasing result for the Diocese.

‘Our audit showed that the Diocese is committed to the safety of children and adults at risk throughout its leadership and in the ministries it provides.’

‘The history of abuse and cover up in the Newcastle region, which the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse shed light on, means that trauma very much exists in the community. Our audit processes, focused on what the Diocese is doing right now to create a safe community, showed that in 2024 there is a firm commitment to being trauma-informed in safeguarding.’

Bishop Michael Kennedy, leader of the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle, also commented positively on the audit experience:

‘At the beginning of this process, I asked that the audit be particularly rigorous. I believed this was important given the history of our Diocese and those survivors who have, and continue to, deal with trauma. Extensive hours of work went into this process and I’m proud that the auditors found that we are successfully implementing and embedding a culture of safeguarding through our Diocese.’

‘Our focus now is to maintain this momentum and continue improving our safeguarding structures, policies, practices and education so that the safeguarding of every child and vulnerable person is an intrinsic part of everything we do in the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle.’

Joint auditor, Mr Sam Burnett of Prolegis Lawyers said of the audit:

‘The Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle provides a range of services and activities to children and vulnerable people across different settings, including in parishes and schools. The safeguarding approach of the Diocese is sufficiently targeted and responsive to those different settings.’

Speaking further on the audit findings, ACSL CEO Dr Ursula Stephens said that several areas of good practice were observed during the audit.

‘The NCSS set best practice in key areas such as human resource management. One of the most impressive strategies noted by the audit team was the Diocese’s centralised system for managing Working With Childrens Checks. Screening and checks of personnel working with vulnerable people (including children), while just one part of the safeguarding equation, are essential tools nonetheless.’

'Giving personnel the knowledge they need to recognise signs of abuse and take action to respond to risks is also essential. The Diocese has a well-structured and regularly reviewed safeguarding training program that is updated with feedback from participants to ensure it stays relevant to personnel.'

'Through our audit we identified some areas for improvement, resulting in seven recommendations. We encourage stronger connection and engagement with adults at risk in the Diocesan community, so that more vulnerable groups can participate fully and safely in ministries and services. We have recommended that the Diocese support its ministries to develop strategies to better include adults at risk in discussions about safeguarding, including ways to provide feedback that are accessible for a variety of needs.'

All recommendations provided by the audit team have been accepted by the Diocese and will be implemented in the next 12 months.

View the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle's audit report on [ACSL's website](#).

**ENDS**

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*ACSL works with Catholic entities to promote and oversee a nationally consistent, comprehensive and sustainable framework for the protection of children and adults at risk within the Church in Australia.*

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