



**RICHARD MARLES
SHADOW MINISTER FOR DEFENCE
MEMBER FOR CORIO**

**NATIONAL APOLOGY TO VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS OF INSTITUTIONAL
CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE**

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*****CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY*****

I also rise to join in the National Apology to Victims and Survivors of Institutional Child Sexual Abuse and, in so doing, I say sorry to those victims, particularly those victims who suffered at institutions in my home town of Geelong, which housed more orphanages than any other place outside of a capital city, which, in turn, means that there is a significant proportion of the population of Geelong today who grew up in institutions of this kind. A tremendous validation to those who have suffered came from the National Apology that occurred on Monday, which is the subject of today's debate. It is incredibly important from that point of view. It was an act of a nation saying that those who suffered are being believed in circumstances where, for so long, they told their stories in a way which was not believed—not the way in which they told their stories but those who received the stories did not believe them and acted, all too often, in indifference to the way in which those children were suffering.

It is hard to understand exactly what motivates a person to engage in this kind of abuse. One thing is clear: there is an enormous power imbalance between the abuser and the children who are suffering. Those who have no parents, who grew up in orphanages were particularly vulnerable. There was no-one looking out for them and they were particularly the subject of those who sought to prey. It seems to me that there is something cold, indifferent and cowardly about choosing people of that kind as victims to satisfy whatever was sought to be satisfied. But what has also been clear in my work, as a patron of the Care Leavers of Australasia Network, is that people who grew up in orphanages, the kids who were being abused, grew up to be adults and they did so carrying a heavy burden with them and, in so many cases, with an enormous amount of damage which, for many, will be with them for the rest of their lives.

As we've heard over the last couple of days in talking about the experiences that people have, many end up taking their lives as adults. I remember speaking with Senator Andrew Murray, who himself was a child migrant, and he noted that the cost to the nation from the pain, the hurt, the dysfunctionality, the loss of productivity and the loss of being able to live a life of those who ultimately grow up is profound and makes this a national issue upon which there needs to be action. There was, as has been explained to me by so many of the people whom I've spoken to during my parliamentary career as a patron of CLAN, also an absence of familial love. Quite aside from the question of abuse, the idea of putting children without parents in large institutions, where no-one called them special, does a particular damage in a universal way to all those who grew up in those circumstances. For them, we say sorry.

On 16 November 2009, when the first apology to the forgotten Australians, as they were known at that time, was given, I very much remember the emotion of that day, the validation of it, and the same sense of being believed but also the acute pain that was on display from all of those who were in that room. This Monday was a reminder of it and an example of this parliament at its best, but there is a tremendous pain associated with this. Words are important in terms of healing, but much more needs to be done.

In saying that, there is an acknowledgement I would like to make of Jason Clare and Steve Irons, colleagues of mine in this place who have been patrons of CLAN as well from day one. We've worked very closely together to try to be advocates for this issue in this place. In the same vein, I would like to also mention Claire Moore, Amanda Rishworth, the late Steve Hutchins and so many more who have been patrons of CLAN and who have tried to raise this issue. Certainly, it is thought of and discussed in a completely different way now from how it was a decade ago. Those who have worked alongside me would agree with this: it's as important a task, it's as important work, as any we have done in this parliament.

There is an uplifting side to this story as well. What has been amazing to me are the people whom I've met on this journey and the strength that they've demonstrated—the courage and the ability to survive perhaps the worst set of cards that people could be dealt with on entry into this world, yet they have done incredible things. Leonie Sheedy comes to mind as the driving force behind CLAN. There are others: Joanna Penglase and Vlad Selakovic. Leonie is a force of nature. She is the single most determined activist I've ever met. None of this would have happened but for her. She's also an angel. She's a saint. There are the times that she has spent listening to people tell their stories—and these are really difficult stories to hear. It is difficult to place yourself in a position of exposure to these stories night after night, but Leonie does it. In doing it, she is tangibly engaging in the act of healing. She is a huge person in this country and has made an enormous difference.

In terms of the act of the profession that we're all engaged in, no-one stands taller than Jenny Macklin. I look at my colleagues here, and she is, to all of us, thoughtful, professional, eminently sensible and an inspiration for how you get things done—not

being showy but just going off there and being diligent, working out the problem and getting an answer. She has done all of that. Julia Gillard, as mentioned, has been in this parliament today with her amazing portrait having been unveiled. The royal commission happened on her watch and would not have happened but for her. The achievements of the royal commission, the inquiry that went with it, the ability to have stories be told, the Redress Scheme that was passed through this parliament earlier this year occurred because of the likes of Leonie, Jenny and Julia. All of them can look with an amazing sense of pride about that.

But there is still work to be done. On Monday the Prime Minister mentioned the need to look at the ways in which those who have grown up in these circumstances enter into aged care. We do need to figure out that problem. We're aware of it, but we're perhaps not aware of the solution. It's also really important to establish a museum, a place, a touchstone for those who lost their youth. I know Leonie would have loved to see that established in her home town of Geelong.

I do want to finally mention Anthony Sheedy, Leonie's brother. He was, throughout his youth, entered into an orphanage. His number was 69411, and he was more often than not referred to by that number rather than his own name. He thought he had no parents, but, at the age of 12, Anthony's parents came and visited him. He thought maybe this was the moment he might be taken home, but sadly it was not that day. They left and he stayed. Can you imagine the confusion of having that experience? In handcuffs, he was taken as a youth to the Turana boys home. His life descended into alcoholic abuse, as an adult, and it was a life spent in homelessness, going between streets and shelters. But a long way down the path, he was discovered by his sister Leonie and in a sense rescued. And in the last nine years of his life he saw happiness. Some of that time he spent as a volunteer in my office, and it was a person who was cheeky and actually enjoying life who we got to meet. Saverina is here in the Chamber today, and I know that, at moments like this, we think about Anthony. He died suddenly back in 2011. He was able to see that first apology. Sadly, he did not experience redress. Indeed, in his personal effects after he died, a letter which would have begun or taken the next step in the redress process was there, and he was unable to pursue it. I'd like to acknowledge his life now. His journey is a vignette of what this story is about: pain, strength, survival but ultimately the fierce urgency of now in taking the next step down this path.

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Authorised by Noah Carroll ALP Canberra