

Sunday, 2 November 2008

LIFTING THE VEIL ON HISTORICAL SEX ABUSE

Attorney-General Michael Atkinson says it's encouraging that in the last five years, 33 sex offenders who would have otherwise escaped justice have been convicted for historical sex crimes.

In June 2003, the Rann Government removed the statute of limitations on sexual abuse committed before December 1982, opening the way for victims to have their voices heard at last.

“Without that vital law reform, dozens of offenders would not have faced the courts and more importantly their victims, many who were children at the time, would not have seen justice done,” Mr Atkinson said.

Between June 2003 and June this year, 585 charges for historical sex offences were finalised by the courts, involving 74 accused persons.

The 585 charges resulted in 116 convictions against 33 different people. This represents an encouraging conviction rate per charge of almost 20% and a conviction rate per accused person of 45%. So almost half the accused coming before the courts for historic sex offences have been found guilty.

“Sex offences, and in particular historical sex offences, are notoriously difficult to prove beyond reasonable doubt for a variety of reasons and early guilty pleas are not common.

“But these cases demonstrate that paedophiles and other sex offenders can't hide from justice, no matter how long ago they committed their crimes,” Mr Atkinson said.

“These convictions have delivered justice for scores of victims and their families who probably thought it would never happen. For many victims, achieving a conviction has helped to heal some of the pain caused by the abuse.”

Of the 116 convictions 107 resulted in an immediate term of imprisonment for 26 people. Jail sentences ranged from 13 months to 25 years.

“These investigations have also helped to uncover more recent sex crimes by the 74 perpetrators with 325 non-historic charges also laid against them,” Mr Atkinson said.

“I'd like to thank the police, prosecutors and the courts for their work on these legally complicated and emotionally-taxing cases. Without them, many victims would never see justice,” he said.

“I also applaud all the victims who have come forward for their bravery and determination over many years. They show other victims of sexual abuse that they don't have to suffer in silence anymore.”

The number of historical sex abuse cases before the courts is expected to increase as a result of the Mullighan Inquiry into the abuse of children in State care and changing attitudes to dealing with sexual abuse, particularly against children.

The Rann Government has granted additional funding of \$2.4 million to the Office of the D.P.P. to help deal with cases arising from the Mullighan Inquiry for the next three financial years, and has allocated \$2.7 million to cope with historical sex crimes since 2004/05.

The Rann Government also granted \$3.9 million for the S.A. Police Paedophile Taskforce over the past three financial years.