Scope
The recommendations address governance and management structures of dioceses and parishes; reporting of child abuse in all situations including confession; and professional development of clergy and all church leaders. The Catholic Church has agreed to support compensation to victims through the national scheme.

In essence, the Royal Commission has called for a fundamental change of culture in the way the Catholic Church operates in Australia.

The Bishops are claiming that 98% of the Royal Commission recommendations have been accepted. However, on closer scrutiny this assertion, to use a colloquial expression “does not pass the pub test” in fact and spirit.

Recommendation 16.7 calls for the Australian Bishops Conference (ACBC) to conduct a national review of the governance and management structures of dioceses and parishes, including in relation to issues of transparency, accountability, consultation and the participation of lay men and women. The Truth Justice and Healing Council recommended that this review should be completed by mid-2019. The results of the governance review should be available for consideration by the Plenary Council. However, the ACBC is highlighting issues of Catholic ecclesiology (theological principles foundational to the nature of the Church) as possible complications to this review. It could be said that to date, the bishops have an unduly cautious approach to progressing this critical recommendation in a timely manner. There appears to be a lack of will and urgency to review or consider change to the” business as usual approach”.

Recommendation 16.8 calls for transparency in appointing bishops with the ACBC choosing to consult the Holy See on this issue. There seems to be some awareness that the people of God in Australia will have views on these matters but no guarantee that they will change current appointment processes.

Appointment processes for Australian bishops should be fully discussed at the Plenary Council.

Recommendations 16.9-17 call for reform of canon law and practices involving the handling of child sexual cases. A standard response to many of these
recommendations is: noted; ACBC has informed the Holy See. This is inadequate given the importance of protecting children from abuse.

Recommendations 16.18 calls for the ACBC to request the Holy See to consider introducing voluntary celibacy for diocesan clergy. The ACBC has informed the Holy See??

Recommendations 16.19-20 call for measures to address the risks of harm to children and the potential psychological and sexual dysfunction associated with a celibate rule of religious life. This recommendation has been accepted.

Recommendations 16.21-25 call for action to improve screening, formation, professional development and support of candidates for the priesthood and priests. This recommendation has been accepted.

Recommendations 7.4; 16.26 cover the need for disclosure of information received about child sexual abuse during confession. These recommendations have been noted, ACBC has informed the Holy See but not accepted the need for changes to the seal of confession.

Recommendations 16.31-50 call for the implementation by the Church of the 10 Child Safe Standards identified by the Royal Commission. These recommendations have been accepted.

Recommendations 16.51-55 relate to policies that support full investigation of all allegations of child sexual abuse. These recommendations have been accepted.

Recommendation 16.56 recommends Catholic priests and religious convicted of child sexual abuse be dismissed from the priesthood and/or dispensed from his or her vows. ACBC accepted this recommendation in principle; and informed the Holy See.

Recommendations 16.57-58 call for a national register of information on risks to children posed by people in religious or pastoral ministry. These recommendations have been accepted.

Further information on responses to the Royal Commission recommendations by the ACBC, the Truth Justice and Healing Council and the Implementation Advisory Group can be found on the ACBC website at
www.catholic.org.au