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New row looms in South Australia over school sex abuse

MICHAEL OWEN | THE AUSTRALIAN | SEPTEMBER 11, 2013 2:35PM

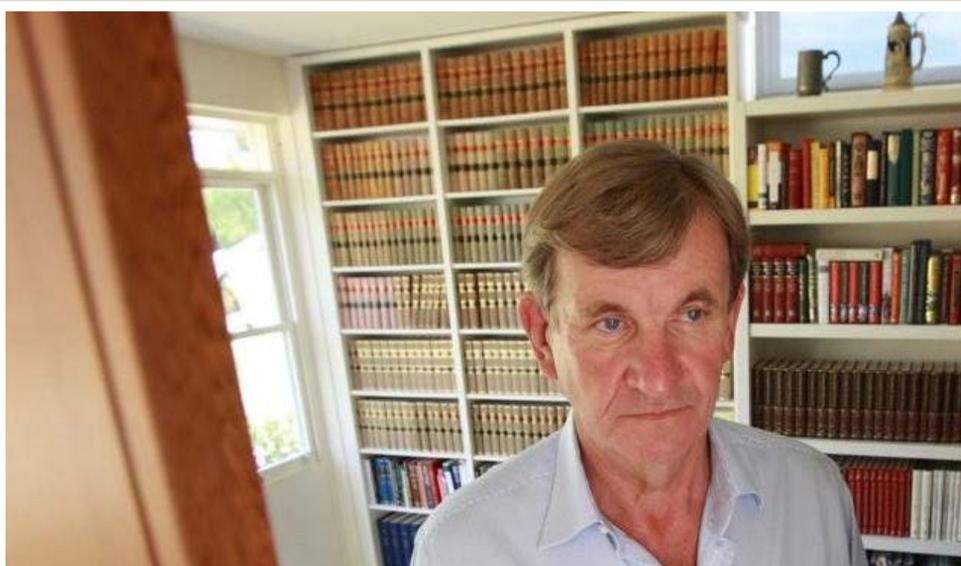
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Retired Supreme Court justice Bruce Debelles conducted an inquiry into sex abuse in public schools. Source: News Limited

THE ALP in South Australia has opened up a new stoush with parents over the Weatherill government's disclosure policy for school sex abuse cases by saying a peak school parents' association declined to take part in a royal commission.

Although this is noted in the report of the royal commission into school sex abuse, the statements today by Labor failed to disclose the reasons, which royal commissioner Bruce Debelles said was because the association found "notice was too short".

In a series of statements on its official Twitter feed today, the ALP singled out volunteer-based group the South Australian Association of State School Organisations.

The ALP said that SAASSO was, "one of only 32 people/orgs that Debelles Royal Commission specifically sent his Issues Paper to. SASSO did not respond".

"SA Assoc of State School Organisations was invited to participate in the Debelles Royal Commission & declined," SA Labor's official Twitter feed said.

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“They had the same notice as the other organisations that did participate.”

SAASSO, along with respected child protection academic Freda Briggs, are supporting a motion for a new parliamentary inquiry into issues arising from a damning royal commission report, released in July.

A vote of state upper house MPs is scheduled for later today in parliament to establish a new inquiry relating to the rape of a 7-year-old girl at a government primary school that was kept from parents for two years. However, while this will be unanimously supported by opposition and crossbench MPs, Premier Jay Weatherill is strongly against it and will refuse to co-operate.

SAASSO president Gino Amato, in a letter to Family First MP Robert Brokenshire, said the association wanted to participate but its request for a time extension was rejected.

He said they did not receive an invitation until December last year asking for a submission before Christmas and advising that consultation would finish before school resumed in the new year.

This left “no chance” for SAASSO to communicate with its members or to meet to provide feedback.

“SAASSO commends Justice DeBelle ... the findings of the DeBelle Inquiry are brutally honest,” the letter said.

“SAASSO wrote to Justice DeBelle asking for more time.

“We pointed out that as a volunteer association, with very limited resources, we are not able to develop a comprehensive submission with such little notice.

“We also asked Justice DeBelle to take into consideration that it was Christmas and that key to SAASSO’s feedback was the involvement of volunteers.

“Our request was denied.”

Mr Amato said earlier this year, SAASSO was once again invited to prepare testimony for the “one and only discussion paper to come from the inquiry - this time, we were given only days to prepare”.

“We realise Justice DeBelle was under strict conditions regarding the timing of his report - but the process was rushed and limited in the opportunity it gave South Australians to be heard.”

MPs believe there are many unanswered questions from the royal commission's report.

This includes matters revealed by The Australian since the report's release, including the role of a ministerial adviser who was not called before Mr DeBelle.

Government documents have highlighted key discrepancies in the royal commission's report about when crucial information about the crime was passed on by the department to the Education Minister's office.

The government has refused to offer an explanation, while Mr DeBelle has said he cannot comment as “my powers as a royal commissioner have ceased”.

The inquiry also would further examine a mystery email chain from within the Premier's office and the government's practice concerning destruction of emails in ministerial offices.

As revealed by The Australian last week, legal claims by parents against the



conflicts of interest as an MP and to absent himself from votes linked to his personal affairs.

Former MP Tripodi faces ICAC probe



MARK COULTAN
FORMER NSW Labor minister Joe Tripodi is under investigation for corruption, the state's investigative agency has revealed.

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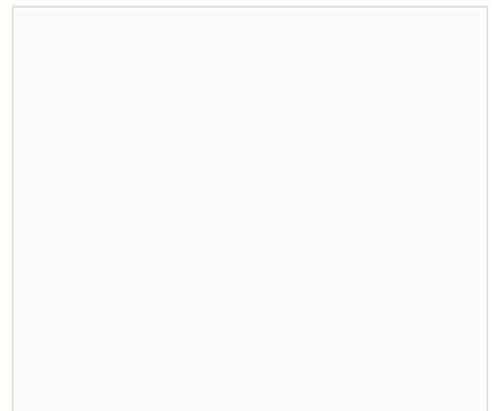
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The rape of a seven-year-old girl in December 2010 by a school services officer has rocked the state Labor government since last October, when the opposition revealed in parliament the crime had been kept secret from a school community for two years.

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