

National

## Vatican defends Cardinal George Pell in child sex abuse scandal

BY: AAP AND NETWORK WRITERS

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Under fire ... the Vatican has defended Australian Cardinal George Pell. Picture: AFP/Andreas Solaro Source: AFP

**THE Vatican has defended its finance chief, Australian Cardinal George Pell, after he was accused by one of Pope Francis' commissioners for child protection of being almost sociopathic.**

Spokesman Federico Lombardi says [Peter Saunders](#), who called for Pell to be dismissed over allegations he covered up abuse and denigrated victims, was expressing his personal views and not speaking on behalf of the commission.

Lombardi told journalists Pell, formerly the top Catholic cleric in Australia, has replied to all questions posed by the authorities and his defence must be considered reliable and worthy of attention and respect.

[Australia's Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse yesterday requested Pell give evidence](#) when the inquiry next meets at a date to be determined.

Pell says he will be present at the hearing.



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Peter Saunders sits on the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors. He breaks his silence on George Pell:

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Mr Saunders, an abuse survivor, made headlines earlier this week when he called on the Pope to sack Cardinal Pell as the Vatican's financial chief over allegations he helped cover up paedophile activity in Australia.

Now Mr Saunders has revealed the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors may not be able to do its job properly due to a lack of resources.

"George Pell is in the Pope's cabinet, the inner sanctum, and is in charge of Vatican finances," he said.

"And the commission will largely be dictated to some extent by the resources that are made available to it ... and my understanding is that there is some financial pressure already in this particular area and I'm pretty appalled at that."

Mr Saunders said it was to the Pope's "great credit" that he was looking to lay people — including some in Australia — to advise him.



Questioned ... Cardinal George Pell appears via video link from the Vatican in the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sex Abuse in 2014. Picture: Sky News Source: Supplied

But the British advocate noted the commission was only scheduled to meet twice yearly, which was inadequate.

“If the financial constraints on our work are imposed then that will hinder the ability of us to do that work,” he said.

“But that’s down to funding and resources, and who’s in charge of funding and resources in the Vatican? You know the answer to that.”

The 58-year-old said the church had to invest in child protection given its dreadful past.

Despite having concerns, Mr Saunders remains confident Francis will ultimately do whatever’s necessary to ensure the commission is a success.



Abuse survivor ... Peter Saunders branded Cardinal George Pell 'almost sociopathic'. Picture: Channel Nine Source: Supplied

It was entirely possible the Pope — the head of a church comprising more than a billion people and hundreds of thousands of clergy — didn't fully understand the history in Australia when he appointed Cardinal Pell, Mr Saunders said.

"There will be times when he doesn't know the intricacies of everything that's gone on in the background to issues around various clergy, possibly including George Pell," he said.

"I think Pope Francis needs to read a little bit more and understand a little bit more about the anger that's been expressed by victims all across Australia at the way in which George Pell has behaved."

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**Royal Commission**  
into Institutional Responses  
to Child Sexual Abuse

In the ordinary course, witnesses are summonsed to appear at a hearing. However a person resident overseas cannot be summonsed. The Chair has received a letter from Cardinal Pell indicating that he is prepared to come to Australia to give evidence. The Royal Commission will ask him to give evidence in the second of the Ballarat hearings.



**Tom McIlroy**  
@TomMcIlroy

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Mr Saunders, the founder of Britain's National Association for People Abused in Childhood, is one of two victims of priest abuse on the Pope's multinational commission.

He's sure Francis is the man to right the wrongs of the past.

"I'm right behind him as I know all my fellow commission members are too," Mr Saunders said, stressing his comments were made as a survivor and advocate, not in his role as a commissioner.

Cardinal Pell, who denies the cover-up allegations, said he was consulting his legal advisers after Mr Saunders said the Australian's lack of care for victims was "almost sociopathic".

Mr Saunders responded by stating the threat of legal action wasn't surprising and he wouldn't shut up for anyone.