

Special school abuse royal commission: extraditing paedophile was deemed too expensive, inquiry hears

By court reporter Candice Marcus

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Budgetary pressures prevented police from extraditing a paedophile school bus driver from Queensland to face court in Adelaide, an inquiry has heard.

Bus driver Brian Perkins sexually abused up to 30 intellectually disabled students in the late 1980s and early 1990s while working at St Ann's special school.

He was finally extradited to South Australia from Queensland in 2002, more than a decade after his offending was discovered. He died in prison in 2009.

The royal commission into the case heard the police investigation was shut down, and when police later found out Perkins was living in Queensland, it was deemed too expensive to extradite him.

It also heard that the only reason Perkins was eventually extradited in 2002 was because the Archbishop of the Catholic Church in Adelaide met with the police commissioner about the matter.

Senior Sergeant Gregory Ramm told the inquiry it was his understanding that the Catholic Church offered to pay for Perkins' extradition.

He said he was called to a meeting with the Catholic Education Office or the Archdiocese with families of students who had attended St Ann's.

"It was expressed to me at the meeting that the Archdiocese would fund the costs of the extradition to make sure he was brought back," Senior Sergeant Ramm said.

Detective Sergeant Mosheev, one of the officers tasked with investigating Perkins, was pressed by Commissioner Atkinson about whether the cost of extradition was a factor in refusing an application to extradite him in 1998.



PHOTO: The Royal Commission is looking at police investigations of the 1990s. (Supplied)

MAP: Adelaide 5000

Q: "So were the costs a significant part of the consideration of the extradition?"

A: "Back in those days the budgetary pressures and expectations were quite significant and it was well known that quite often extraditions weren't approved even for serious matters."

The inquiry heard the cost of extraditing Perkins from Queensland was several thousand dollars.

Detective Sergeant Mosheev also said it was "pressure from the Archbishop of the Catholic Church" in Adelaide that finally prompted Perkins' extradition to Adelaide from Queensland in 2002.

Q: "So your understanding is that this decision to now extradite Perkins came about because the Archbishop of the Catholic Church of Adelaide visited the police commissioner?"

A: "Yes, yes."

Licence check led police to paedophile

Senior Sergeant Ramm also said he found Perkins in 1998, four years after Perkins had fled to Queensland, simply by doing a licence check.

He said he had kept an interest in keeping track of the paedophiles, including Perkins, who had been identified in Operation Deny, even though the operation had been shut down.

"I realised that Perkins was the only one that hadn't been caught up with and did some checks on him," he said.

"It came up with a drivers licence. He had renewed his drivers licence in Queensland."

He said he thought it was "very poor" that Perkins was not extradited in 1998.

"I thought he should've been brought back," he said.

"They were involved in more than just a few kids - they were involved in a paedophile network that stretched worldwide to more than five or six counties."

Halt in investigation referred to anti-corruption branch

The inquiry also heard that, in 1993, assistant commissioner Colin Watkins ordered Operation Deny be shut down, along with a police investigation into St Ann's school.

It heard Detective Sergeant Leonid Mosheev planned to speak with students' parents

before the police operations were shut down, but went on extended sick leave and no other officer took over those matters.

Detective Sergeant Mosheev was cross-examined by lawyer Peter Humphries, representing some of the St Ann's parents, about the anti-corruption investigation.

Q: "Am I correct in understanding that you, and perhaps other detectives, were sufficiently concerned about the direction to shut down Operation Deny that it ended up being investigated by the anti-corruption branch?"

A: "That's correct."

Q: "And I think ultimately the finding of that investigation was that there was no criticism made of the assistant commissioner Watkins?"

A: "Yes. I wasn't privy to the results until recent times."

Earlier Commissioner Atkinson questioned Detective Sergeant Mosheev about his inability to follow up the investigation once it had shut down in 1993.

Q: "Did you ever think, 'well perhaps I had better go and see the senior sergeant and the inspector and ask them to reopen the investigation and give it back to me and I will go and try to find out if there are any other victims?'"

A: "Well, I just think I assumed it had been done properly. I can't recall doing any other inquiries."

The commission was told former assistant commissioner Watkins cannot provide a statement or be called to give evidence because he has since died.

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