



# **ACT Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions**

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## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **RE: REPORT PRESENTED BY THE SEXUAL ASSAULT PREVENTION AND RESPONSE STEERING COMMITTEE**

**14 December 2021**

The Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP), Mr Shane Drumgold SC, has today publicly welcomed the report presented to the ACT Government by the Sexual Assault and Response Steering Committee entitled “Listen. Take Action to Prevent, Believe and Heal.”

Recommendation 15 is that “the ACT Government establish and fund an independent cross-agency taskforce to undertake a review of all sexual assault cases reported to ACT Policing that were not progressed to charge, including those deemed unfounded, uncleared or withdrawn.”

Recommendation 15 was made in the context of the ACT having one of the lowest charge rates in Australia in relation to sexual assault complaints. In 2020 only 2.8% of finalised police investigations into sexual assault complaints resulted in charges being laid in court.

Mr Drumgold stated that he is very supportive of recommendation 15, and confirmed that his office would be willing to prosecute such matters where there is a reasonable prospect of conviction, and the complainant is willing.

“We know that to date the criminal justice system has been far from perfect in that way in which complaints of sexual assault have been dealt with by criminal justice agencies” Mr Drumgold said.

“The experience of victim survivors has varied considerably. Many complaints have been dealt with diligently and professionally, but we cannot shy away from the fact that many have not.”

“I look forward to building on the constructive work already done by the ACT Justice and Community Safety Directorate, ACT Policing, and my office.”

Mr Drumgold noted that there was an imperative for such work to commence without delay.

“The passage of time can have a bearing on the prospect of successfully prosecuting belatedly charged sexual assault matter. Memories can fade over time, corroborative evidence can be harder to obtain, and witnesses relocate” Mr Drumgold said.

Mr Drumgold also expressed his strong support for the law reform recommendations made in the report.

“The report recommends that maximum penalties for certain types of sexual offending be increased. I strongly support this recommendation.”

“The report identified that those who are convicted of sexual offending in the ACT are less likely to be imprisoned than those who commit similar offences in other jurisdictions, and where they are imprisoned, the length of the sentence will likely be less.”

“Whilst rehabilitation is always an important sentencing consideration, deterrence, denunciation, community protection and recognising the serious and irreversible harm caused to victim survivors are also particularly important considerations for such insidious offences.”

“The report identifies that the relatively lenient sentencing regime for sexual offending in the Territory to date is inconsistent with community expectations and the strong message that needs to be sent that sexual violence is never acceptable.”

**End media release**