



Attorney-General

5 - MAY 2011

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Mr Neale Burgess MP
State Member for Hastings
PO Box 909
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Dear Mr Burgess MP

RE: Working with Children Check and correspondence from Mr Steven Unthank

Thank you for your letter dated 14 March 2011 where you seek my comments in respect of an email you received on 2 February 2011, from Mr Steven Unthank.

In his email, Mr Unthank documents his experiences within the Jehovah's Witnesses and alleges ongoing breaches of the *Working with Children Act 2005* (the Act) by this organisation. I note that Mr Unthank has since filed documents with the Morwell Magistrates Court seeking criminal prosecution against the Jehovah's Witnesses for these alleged breaches.

The Department of Justice takes Mr Unthank's allegations seriously and has dealt directly with both Mr Unthank and the Jehovah's Witnesses on a number of occasions.

Mr Unthank first wrote to the department alleging breaches of the Act by the Jehovah's Witnesses in July 2008. The department responded by referring Mr Unthank to the Sexual Offences and Child Abuse Unit of Victoria Police, emphasising the importance that he report his allegations to the police. Correspondence was also sent at this time to the management of Jehovah's Witnesses in Australia informing them of their obligations under the Act.

Ministers or Elders within the Jehovah's Witnesses are required to undergo a WWC Check under section 9(3)(i) of the Act (religions organisations) if their work satisfies the definition of child-related work under section 9(1) of the Act.

The department has written to the management of Jehovah's Witnesses in Australia on a number of occasions, most recently in November 2010, informing them of their obligations under the Act and offering to meet and conduct information sessions for their staff and Ministers.

Victoria Police have responsibility for investigations and enforcement of the Act and it is therefore appropriate that the WWC Check Unit refer matters of alleged breaches to Victoria Police for action.

Staff from the WWC Check Unit continue to liaise with Victoria Police about the matters raised by Mr Unthank and understand that Victoria Police is actively dealing with Mr Unthank's claims.

I trust this addresses your concerns. If you have any further queries, please contact Ms Fiona Chamberlain, Director, WWC Check Unit, on (03) 8803 8523.

Thank you for your interest in the WWC Check scheme.

Yours sincerely



ROBERT CLARK MP
Attorney-General

1/5/11