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 Legislation spells the end for Banksia Park Puppies

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SPORTING HEROES
 Hit on Sale Oval

SPORT

WEATHER FORECAST Friday Sunny - Min: 2 Max: 21 Saturday Mostly sunny - Min: 6 Max: 25 Sunday Showers increasing - Min: 13 Max: 24 Monday Showers - Min: 9 Max: 19

Plans for an appeal

Former St Pat's teacher denies child sexual crimes

Alex Ford

A MAFFRA man sentenced to 12 months in prison and lifetime sex offender registration after being found guilty of child sex crimes, has since been bailed after indicating his intent to appeal the sentence.

Lawrence Todd Stevenson, 86, who again appeared in court wearing a kilt, pleaded not guilty on Tuesday to four charges of unlawfully and indecently assaulting boys.

The boys were aged between 11 and 14 at the time of the alleged offences, which the court was told took place between 1979 and 1982.

Mr Stevenson was a woodwork teacher at St Patrick's College in Sale between 1979 and 1981, and was a lay teacher, not a Marist Brother.

One of the victims alleged he was lured to a storage room between April 2 and September 28 1979, and repeatedly hugged and kissed.

Another charge related to an incident at the Coonawarra school camp in the late 70s.

All three victims who brought charges were students at the time, and were present in court.

Mr Stevenson lodged an appeal on Wednesday, and has now sought legal representation.

He has been deemed a low flight risk, and has been bailed to face the County Court soon.

The charges followed an investigation by the SANO Task Force last year.

In court, Mr Stevenson represented himself, and said he had chosen not to read the charges or witness statements that were supplied to him, before confirming his plea of not guilty.

He asked that the magistrate decide the case on the day, instead of facing a trial before a jury, agreeing that he would not cross-examine witnesses and would decline legal advice.

Magistrate Clive Alsop said as it was a criminal trial, the court must be satisfied beyond reasonable doubt, and found the charges proven.

He noted that while there was no criminal history and Mr Stevenson was of advanced age, the allegations were sex offences against children

by a person of authority, in circumstances which indicated deliberate planning.

Magistrate Alsop said Mr Stevenson's behaviour was "brazen" in seeking his "own gratification".

Witness statements indicated and confirmed that his behaviour was not without consequences for each victim.

After being sentenced, Mr Stevenson sought to avoid prison, saying he needed to care for his wife.

"I ask permission to continue fulfilling my duty of taking care of my wife," he said.

The magistrate declined, and said Mr Stevenson could appeal the sentence.

"Thank you, I appreciate the court's violence to women," Mr Stevenson replied, before being taken to the secure dock.

Immediately after Tuesday's court date, one of Stevenson's alleged victims told the *Gippsland Times* he thought the 12-month sentence was appropriate.

The man, now in his 50s, said the actions of sexual offenders could have far-reaching consequences for their victims, often lasting for decades.

"After the trial it was a privilege to meet with other courageous survivors, people who were courageous enough to seek justice, and who felt empowered," he said.

The witness urged other people who had been victims of historical sexual assaults to speak with SANO Task Force investigators.

He also recommended Survivors & Mates Support Network (SAMSAN), a not-for-profit organisation working to increase public awareness of the effects that childhood sexual abuse can have on men in their adult lives.

This latest court appearance follows the arrest by SANO Task Force detectives of an 87-year-old Sale man in February last year, following an investigation into historical sexual assault allegations at St Pat's.

At the time, investigators said they had received a number of complaints from former male students who attended the school during the 1970s and 1980s, when it operated as a boarding school.

Those allegations related to male students who were then aged between 11 and 15.



Lawrence Todd Stevenson, 86, of Maffra, is led away after being found guilty of indecent assaults on school children in the 1970s and 80s. He maintains his innocence, and plans to appeal the sentence.

St Patrick's College was a Marist Brothers school, as is Catholic College Sale, formed following the amalgamation of Our Lady of Sion College and St Patrick's College.

The SANO Task Force was established to investigate historic and new allegations that have emanated from the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into child sex abuse involving religious and non-government organisations.

The task force also co-ordinates investigations

emerging from the Australian Government Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

People with information about child sexual abuse in an institutional context can email the SANO Task Force sanotaskforce@police.vic.gov.au or phone the SANO Task Force on 1800 110 007.

To report a child at immediate risk or danger, phone 000 or a local police station.

For more information about the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, visit the website www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au

For more information about SAMSAN, visit www.samsn.org.au, which also has links to other related organisations.

Marist Brothers issue statement

Marist Brothers Australia issued a statement this week following Tuesday's verdict:

"We take this opportunity to reiterate our enduring apology to those who have suffered past abuse and the impact of that on their lives.

"The Marist Brothers actively encourage any person with evidence of criminal behaviour to take that to the police for the appropriate investigation, no matter when or where it occurred.

"Marist Schools Australia schools, and indeed all Catholic schools, have as their highest priority the protection of students with stringent policies and procedures in place, backed by mandated government regulations."



Hannah Bagguley, Krystal Ward, Seth Hughes, and Tristan Scott enjoy a new 'mud kitchen', built by John Douglas for the Glassford Street Kindergarten in Maffra.

Muddy kinder fun

CHILDREN at Glassford Street Kindergarten in Maffra are enjoying new play equipment, hand-made by a local grandfather.

Handyman John Douglas, of Maffra, saw a notice advertising wooden pallets, and decided to create some buildings for the children.

"I came up with my granddaughter, and they had all these posters inside," he said.

"I thought, easy, not a problem."

Mr Douglas built a mud kitchen, a music hall, garden and a small bridge for the children.

The mud kitchen in particular has been a favourite, according to early childhood teacher Lisa Stewart.

"It's been a really great community project, and all good learning spaces for the children," she said.

"The mud kitchen was the first, the second one was the bridge which filled a corner the children weren't using that well which has made that space usable, and we put the stones

in so they could make dry riverbeds.

"The music hall, in the other corner — we've got children that love to make lots of noise.

"It's kind of a work in progress, because we can add things to it — it's very interactive."

The recycled pallets also taught the children about sustainability, as well as developing imaginative and creative play and fostering social development.

"We wanted some permanent structures that the children could engage with on different levels, but we also wanted to recycle some materials and be sustainable," Ms Stewart said.

"We talk to the children about what they're made from and what the pallets are used for."

Mr Douglas said he had a few more projects in mind.

"It's good for the kids; they have fun with it," he said.

"I don't mind it.

"It keeps me occupied, and I love doing it."