

**MURRAY HARVEY
BISHOP OF THE DIOCESE OF GRAFTON
IN THE ANGLICAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA**

PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS ORDINANCE 2004 (as amended June 2021)

In the matter of the Honourable Patrick Comben AO

**DECISION PURSUANT TO CLAUSE 71 OF THE PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS ORDINANCE
2004 (as amended June 2021)**

1. I am the Church Authority in accordance with the *Professional Standards Ordinance 2004 (as amended June 2021)* (**the Ordinance**) in the matter of the Professional Standards Committee (**Committee**) vs the Honourable Patrick Comben AO (**Patrick Comben**).
2. Patrick Comben is the subject of a recommendation of the Professional Standards Board (**Board**) concerning his fitness to remain in Holy Orders.
3. I must consider the recommendation) in accordance with the Ordinance.
4. Patrick Comben is currently resident in the Diocese of Brisbane.
5. I must, therefore, also consider the requirements of the *Holy Orders (Removal from Exercise of Ministry) Canon 2017* (**the Canon**).
6. I rely on the Report of the Board, the evidence set out therein and the reasons for the Board's recommendation.

Background

1. This matter was referred to the Board on 4 July 2023.
2. The Board considered the matter on 10th and 11th December, 2025, at which time Patrick Comben attended with legal representation and gave evidence under oath.
3. The Board provided me with its recommendation in a report dated 20th February 2026.
4. The Board has recommended that Patrick Comben be deposed from Holy Orders.
5. I have determined to accept the Board's recommendation.
6. Under the provisions of Part 8A of the Ordinance my decision was a reviewable decision.
7. On 17 March 2026 Patrick Comben sought, via his legal representative, a review of the Board's determination and recommendation, as provided for in Part 8A.

8. The grounds for that application were that:
 - a. The Board's decision constituted a breach of natural justice.
 - b. Procedures that were required by the Ordinance to be observed in the making of the Board's recommendation were not observed.
 - c. The Board's decision was so devoid of justification that no reasonable Board would have made it.

Status of the Matter

9. An independent review of the matter was conducted by Carol Webster SC who was appointed on the recommendation of the President of the NSW Bar Association.
10. On 14 September I received her determination that the application for review be dismissed
11. Accordingly, the Board's determination and recommendation stand.

Key considerations

12. The Board's report contains convincing evidence that in relation to five discrete matters involving both responding to claims against the Diocese and the holding to account of persons, including clergy, who were the subject of serious allegations of sexual and other abuse of children, there was inappropriate and unreasonable conduct and omission on the part of Patrick Comben, during the time he was Registrar of the Diocese of Grafton, and that in respect of these matters he engaged in examinable conduct.
13. The report also contains evidence that Patrick Comben engaged in conduct that was unbecoming and inappropriate to the role, office or position of the General Manager/Registrar of the Diocese of Grafton. This related particularly to his undertaking some of the functions designated to the Director of Professional Standards, apparently without recognising that doing so placed him in a position of conflict and in breach of s4.7 of the Faithfulness in Service code.
14. In addition, the Board's report carefully sets out its views about the "defenses" raised by Patrick Comben both in written submission and in the giving of evidence. On balance the Board concluded that the defences raised by Patrick Comben were "ineffective" in

exonerating him from responsibility for the serious deficiencies in his conduct identified by the Board.

15. The Board concluded that Patrick Comben's complete absence of insight as to the deficiencies in his conduct militated strongly against the proposition that he was currently fit to hold office or remain in Holy Orders and left it without the necessary confidence that, if faced with similar situations or with difficult issues at whatever level, he would have the capacity to behave appropriately and reasonably to the standards demanded by the Anglican Church of Australia.

The obligations of the Bishop

16. It is my responsibility to balance the interests of all parties in making my decision.
17. I must be cognisant of any adverse impacts of my decision on the Respondent having in mind the *Briginshaw* principles.
18. The Bishop has the responsibility to be mindful of the class of faithful deacons and priests who presently and previously have undertaken ministry. The failures by one deacon or priest reflect on all deacons and priests.
19. The decision of the Bishop must be such that clergy, parishioners, and the wider community can have confidence in the function of the ordained ministry and those in the ordained ministry can have confidence in themselves.
20. Further, the decision of the Bishop is made public so that the Church can see the care and attention given to such matters by the Bishop and that the people of God, especially the clergy, might reflect on what is expected of them.
21. It has been observed that a wide circle of people takes a close interest in our disciplinary and fitness proceedings.

My decision

22. I accept the recommendation of the Board that the Honourable Patrick Comben AO be deposed from Holy Orders and have advised the relevant Bishop, in accordance with the requirements of s.6 of the Canon, on 16 September 2026.

The effect of my decision

23. The effect of my decision, when enacted, is that the Honourable Patrick Comben AO:

- a. may not:
 - i. officiate or act in any manner as a priest or deacon of this Church; or
 - ii. or hold any office in this Church capable of being held only by a person in Holy Orders;
- b. ceases to have any right, privilege or advantage attached to the office of priest or deacon;
- c. shall not hold himself out to be a member of the clergy;
- d. may not hold an office in a diocese of the Anglican Church which may be held by a lay person without the consent of the bishop of that diocese;
- e. shall be considered to be a lay person for the purposes of all laws, canons, rules, ordinances and regulations of the Anglican Church of Australia except for any provision enacted under Chapter IX of the Constitution.

24. This decision will be recorded on the National Register of the Anglican Church of Australia.

DATED:

16th September 2026