

NEWS

George Pell: The surf club allegation

7.30 By Louise Milligan and Andy Burns

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PHOTO: Cardinal George Pell was at the centre of Royal Commission hearings into the Ballarat Diocese (Getty Images)

When local businessman Les Tyack walked into the Torquay Surf Club change rooms one day in the summer of 1986-87, he encountered a scene that struck him as "very odd" — George Pell with three boys he estimates were aged between 8 and 10.

"I said, 'Hi George', and at that time he was towelling, had the towel going across his shoulders drying his back, but he was facing three young boys standing about three or four metres across from him," Mr Tyack told 7.30.

He thought it was "a little strange", but he put his gear onto the bench and had a shower.

"I was in the showers for probably five to 10 minutes and when I came out the boys had got dressed," Les Tyack said.

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Key points

- Local businessman, Les Tyack, says he witnessed an "odd" incident involving George Pell at the Torquay Surf Club in 1986-87
- He did nothing at the time but last year reported it to the Royal Commission and Victoria Police's Taskforce SANO
- Cardinal Pell emphatically denies ever abusing anyone

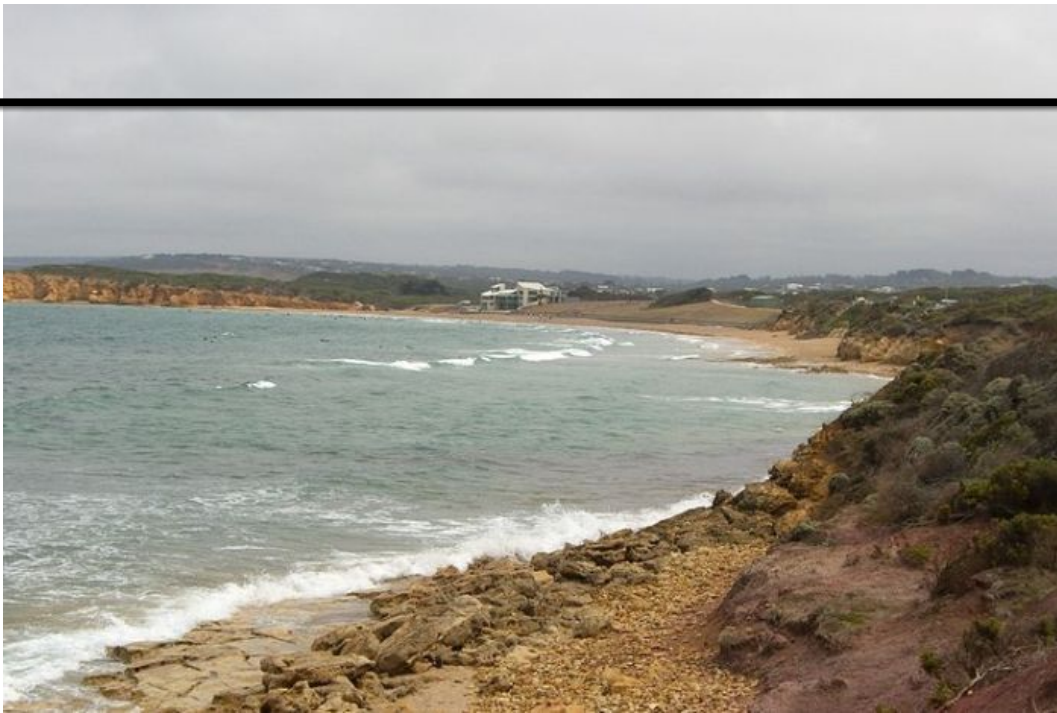


PHOTO: Torquay surf beach (Wikimedia)

"But Pell just had the towel over his right shoulder, still facing the boys, and the boys were looking at him, there was no communication between them, but Pell was looking at the boys they were looking at him."

"I immediately thought this is not right, there is something amiss here."

Mr Tyack says the thing that disturbed him was that the naked Pell had stood there for 10 minutes facing the boys.

"I thought that was not on," he said.

"(It was a) very strange situation for an adult to be full-frontal to three young boys."

He said he told the young boys to "finish doing what you're doing, off you go".

"When they left, I then said to George Pell, 'I know what you're up to, piss off, get out of here, if I see you back in this club again, I'll call the police'," he said.

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Pell made no response at all when I challenged him: Les Tyack

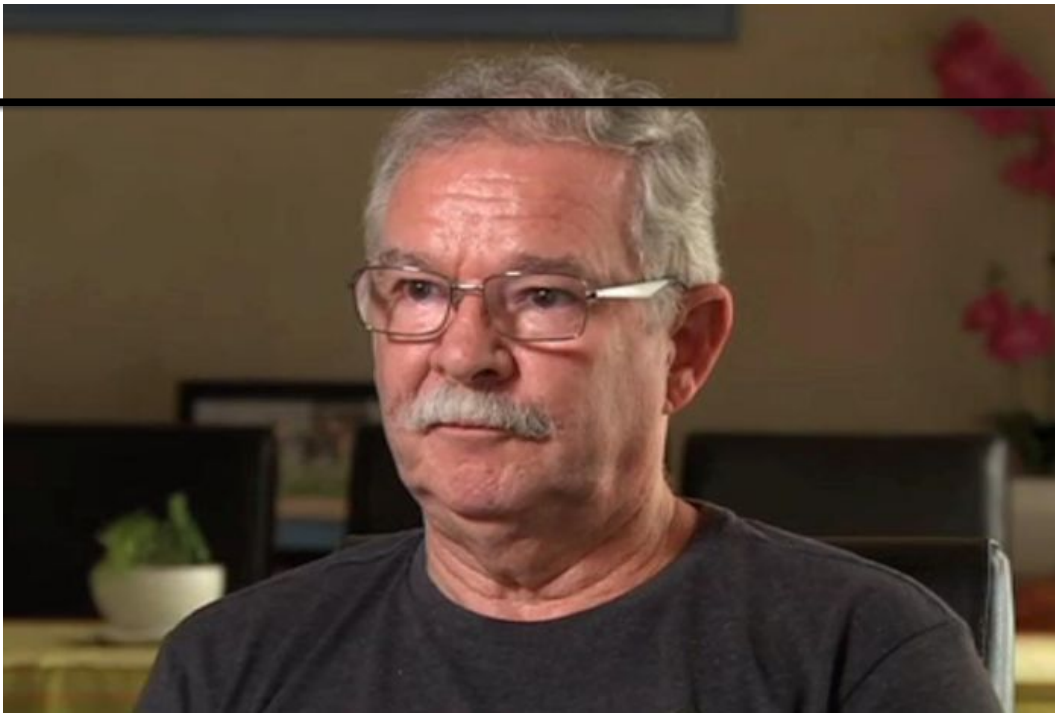


PHOTO: Torquay businessman Les Tyack remembers an unusual incident with George Pell in the Torquay Surf Club change rooms.

Mr Tyack did not see the priest at the club again.

But club records show George Pell was a member of the club for many years and he has publicly stated that it was his practice to holiday every summer in Torquay during the period.

Mr Tyack said one of his biggest concerns was how George Pell's torso was angled during the incident.

"It makes me very suspicious that he was exposing himself to those three young boys," he said.

"He made sure that at no time was I given the opportunity to see the front of him."

"(I thought that was) very suspicious, because when I challenged him, he made no response to me at all - which I thought quite odd."

"I'm certain that if I'd been challenged in such a manner, I certainly would've fired up with questioning: What do you mean? What are you talking about?"

"But, no. Pell went very silent. Didn't say a word."

At the time Mr Tyack did nothing more, but after hearing other allegations about clergy in the Royal Commission last year, he decided to report the Torquay incident because if there were other potential victims of George Pell it might form part of a "dossier" for police.

Last year, Mr Tyack made a statement to both the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and Victoria Police's Taskforce SANO about the incident..

Cardinal Pell rejects claims that he has abused anyone

Cardinal Pell declined to address Mr Tyack's specific allegations, or anyone else's, in the statement sent by his office to 7.30.

Pell's career in the Catholic Church



Cardinal George Pell is one of the most prominent and controversial figures in the Australian Catholic Church. Look back at his career.

But he rejects claims that he "sexually abused anyone, in any place, at any time in his life", and says any allegations of such are "totally untrue and completely wrong".

Read the full statement from George Pell's office

"The Cardinal's conduct has been repeatedly scrutinised over many years, including before the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into the Handling of Child Abuse by Religious and Other Organisations and ... by Victoria Police's SANO Taskforce," the statement says.

However, the royal commission is yet to make findings on the Cardinal's evidence to it in February, and neither it nor the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry publicly examined allegations of child sexual abuse by the Cardinal himself.

7.30 understands Taskforce SANO has sought the advice of the Victorian Office of Public Prosecutions.

The Cardinal is entitled to a presumption of innocence and police and prosecutors will make their own decisions about whether to press charges on any of the allegations against him.

Topics: child-abuse, catholic, sexual-offences, torquay-3228, australia

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