



One charge against George Pell withdrawn after accuser dies

Cardinal will now face four-week hearing to determine whether he stands trial on historical sexual offence charges

Australian Associated Press

Thu 1 Mar 2018 19.56 EST

One of the multiple historical sexual offence charges against Cardinal George Pell has been withdrawn because the accuser has died.

Pell will face a four-week committal hearing beginning on Monday to determine if he stands trial on charges involving multiple complainants. He denies the charges.

Mark Gibson SC, crown prosecutor, told Melbourne magistrates' court on Friday that the charge was being withdrawn.

The court has previously heard one of the complainants had died.

Belinda Wallington, the presiding magistrate, on Friday ruled the defence could question one witness about the timing of allegations by others, but not the detail.

“There is no intention to trawl through detail of abuse at the hands of other clergy,” Wallington said.

She said questions which did not delve into detail likely to cause distress would be allowed.

Pell’s barrister, Ruth Shann, said at issue was the timing of complaints.

“The focus is about the timing, but relevant to that particular witness, it is also the timing of the ... allegations because of material that we are aware of which makes those people in those locations at that time, in essence, impossible,” Shann said.

Pell, the highest-ranking Catholic official to be charged with historical sexual offences, will face a four-week committal hearing.

The former Sydney and Melbourne archbishop and Ballarat priest has taken leave from his position as Vatican treasurer to fight the charges.

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