

The Sunday Times



# Sect 'hides its money'

## Cash kept from child victims

14 Jun 2020 NATALIE O'BRIEN



**SECRETIVE** Christian sect Jehovah's Witnesses has been accused of selling off assets and pushing cash offshore to avoid paying Australian child sex abuse victims.

# The Advertiser

NATIONAL

## Jehovah's Witnesses accused of selling off assets and moving cash to avoid sex abuse compensation

Natalie O'Brien, Senior reporter, News Corp Australia Network

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 Subscriber only

**Exclusive:** Secretive Christian sect Jehovah's Witnesses has been accused of selling off assets and pushing cash offshore to avoid paying Australian child sex abuse victims.

For the first time, News Corp can expose the complex web of legal entities obscuring the true wealth and financial activities of the group — and that its charity status may be revoked if it does not sign up to the National Redress Scheme.

The special investigation also reveals the failure of authorities to look into allegations by whistleblowers that JW may be hiding its money before the June 30 deadline to join the scheme.

It has been named in the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse as having 1800 potential victims and more than 1000 alleged paedophiles, 537 of them self-confessed. But there is no evidence the sect referred any cases to police.



 Jehovah's Witness Kingdom Halls are all over Australia and across the world. Picture: Rob Leeson.

# Jehovah's Witness child sex abuse claims

Source: Royal Commission into Institutional Response to Child Sexual Abuse

**1800**

Alleged victims of abuse

**1006**

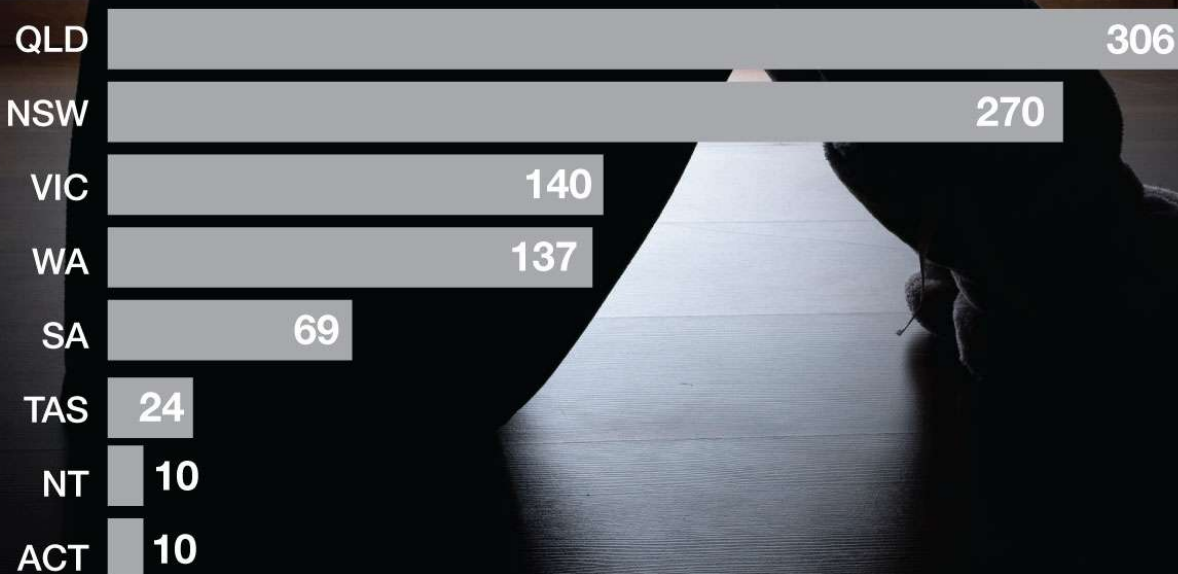
Potential perpetrators

**537**

Self confessed perpetrators

No evidence of any referrals to police or authorities

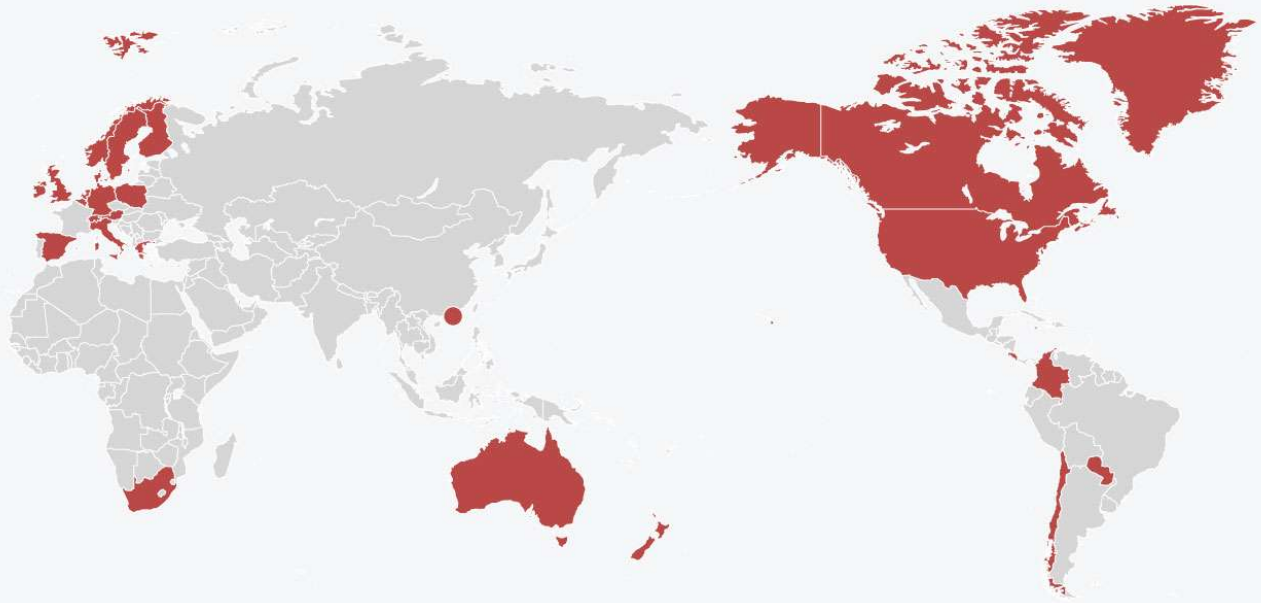
## State by state breakdown of perpetrators



The sheer numbers of potential victims and perpetrators to the number of members outstrips those of the Catholic Church – and exposes it to financial compensation under the redress scheme of possibly \$132 million.

But JW, which has almost 68,000 members, has not indicated whether it will sign up for the scheme. Instead it has begun rearranging its finances and legal entities.

# Where Jehovah's Witnesses properties are



Australia	Germany	Poland
Austria	Greece	Puerto Rico
Bahamas	Hong Kong	South Africa
Belgium	Ireland	Spain
Canada	Italy	Sweden
Chile	Jamaica	Switzerland
Colombia	Netherlands	United Kingdom
Costa Rica	New Zealand	United States
Denmark	Norway	
Finland	Paraguay	

## In Australia

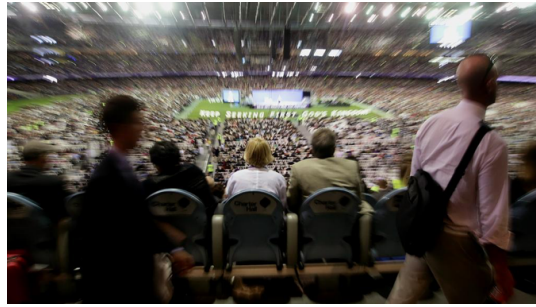


Source: WatchTower Exposed

News Corp can reveal since the announcement of the Royal Commission on November 12, 2012 JW has:

- Restructured its legal charities and entities;
- Grown from a handful of charities to 836 separate small basic religious charities (766 active now) listed as registered on December 3, 2012 on the Australian Charities and Not for profits Commission (ACNC) site. Small basic religious charities are not required to provide financial information.
- Appears to have had only one charity (the Watchtower and Bible and Tract Society of Australia Ltd) supplying financial reports to ACNC;
- Reported to the ACNC \$150 million in income for Watchtower since 2014;
- Submitted financial reports to the ACNC for Watchtower showing almost \$100 million from 2014-2019 allocated to "Donations and Overseas Aid".
- Made a loan of about \$6 million (with no short term repayment plans) to the UK International Bible Students Association IBSA (listed in UK IBSA 2015 accounts)
- Submitted Watchtower financial reports to the ACNC stating it is operating at a loss; \$1.9 million deficit in 2019; and \$1.2 million 2018, after making surpluses for previous three years.
- Been reported to the redress scheme, by whistleblowers, as allegedly selling off more than \$24 million in related properties since 2012;
- Not declared in the past six years of Watchtower financial reports to the ACNC any potential financial implications

from the Redress Scheme.

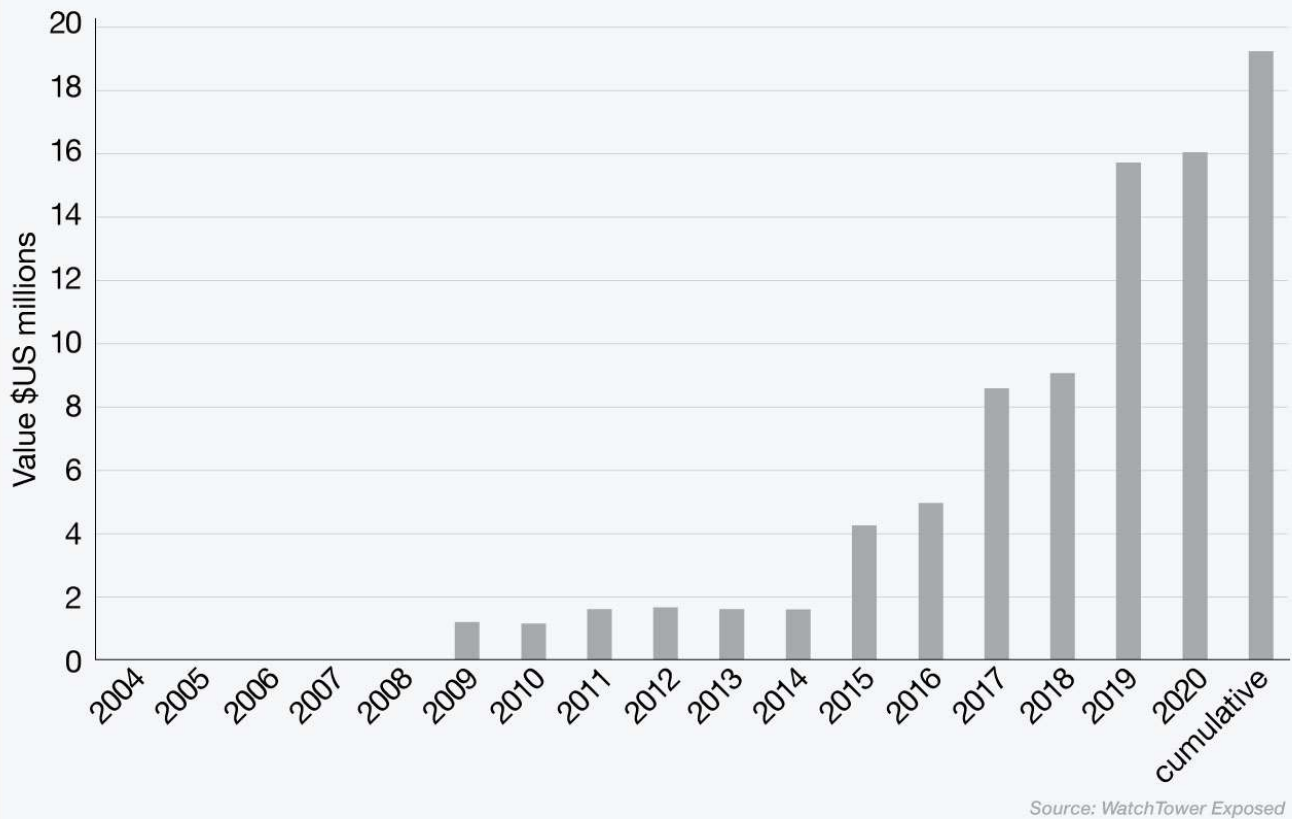


The International Convention of Jehovah's Witnesses in 2014 attracted big crowds. Picture: Hamish Blair

When contacted Jehovah's Witnesses said: "We have considered your request, however, as your questions appear to be based on factual inaccuracies and incorrect assumptions, we respectfully decline to participate."

News Corp asked for JW to state the inaccuracies and incorrect assumptions, but JW did not respond.

## Alleged WatchTower Property Sales - Australia



The official position of the Jehovah's Witness organisation as given to the Royal Commission is that it abhors child sexual abuse and that it will not protect any perpetrator. and the key submissions made on behalf of the Watchtower & Ors was familial child sexual abuse is not institutional sexual abuse.

JW child sex abuse survivors, Lara Kaput and Steven Unthank, who founded website, SaySorry.org, have tried unsuccessfully to alert authorities, including the financial watchdog AUSTRAC and the Australian Federal Police amid growing fears it is attempting to dodge its obligations to victims. A spokesperson for Austrac and the AFP said they do not confirm or deny specific activity the agencies may be undertaking.



📷 Former Jehovah's Witness Larissa Kaput. Picture: Rob Leeson.

Ms Kaput, recently supplied property sales data to the Joint Select Committee on Implementation of the National Redress Scheme, which she says shows more than \$24 million in sales by JW linked entities since the Royal Commission was announced and that sales were accelerating in recent years. But the Committee have advised they have no power to investigate or refer the information for investigation.

“Not only have they (JW) not joined the Redress Scheme, but they appear to be ensuring they can say they don't have enough money for any redress,” said Ms Kaput.



📷 Kingdom Hall in Springvale South Victoria, where Lara Kaput was once a member, sold for \$1.4 million after she gave evidence at the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses into Child Sexual Abuse.



📷 A JW-linked property in Warners Bay in NSW

that was sold recently.

“The authorities have really let us down. We need to focus on what is happening here in Australia.”

Ms Kaput told the Committee in March, previous attempts to find “the front door” of the Jehovah’s Witnesses has proved difficult.

“ ... the Department of Social Security has attempted to negotiate with the Jehovah’s Witnesses and ... the honourable Paul Fletcher MP was unable to ‘find their front door’. We can support you, because we know how they mask their legal entities. The governing body, which are really in charge, endorse a strategy they call ‘theocratic warfare’. We can help you by giving some examples of how this works and how they will be avoiding you.”

The Minister for Families and Social Services Senator Anne Ruston said from July 1, the Government will “name and shame institutions and consider financial sanctions such as revoking charitable status” if they do not join the redress scheme.



A former Kingdom Hall at Camp Hill in Queensland sold for \$1.5 million last year.

Ms Kaput believes it is unlikely any JW-linked organisations will voluntarily join the scheme and victims may be forced to take civil action or class action, but there may be no assets left.

Lawyer Peter Kelso, whose firm specialises in acting for victims of abuse, fears there is only one way for an outcome and that is to sue JW.

“It is unlikely that the JW’s will offer a settlement and the people will be forced to go to the courts and it may be something they can’t afford to do,” said Mr Kelso.

## JEHOVAH’S WITNESS ABUSE SURVIVORS WANT JUSTICE

Child sexual abuse survivors Steven Unthank and Lara Kaput founded the SaySorry.org website in the hope of holding Jehovah’s Witnesses organisations accountable.

The Victorians have spent years providing information to police, government, inquiries, law firms, and the media about the JWs.

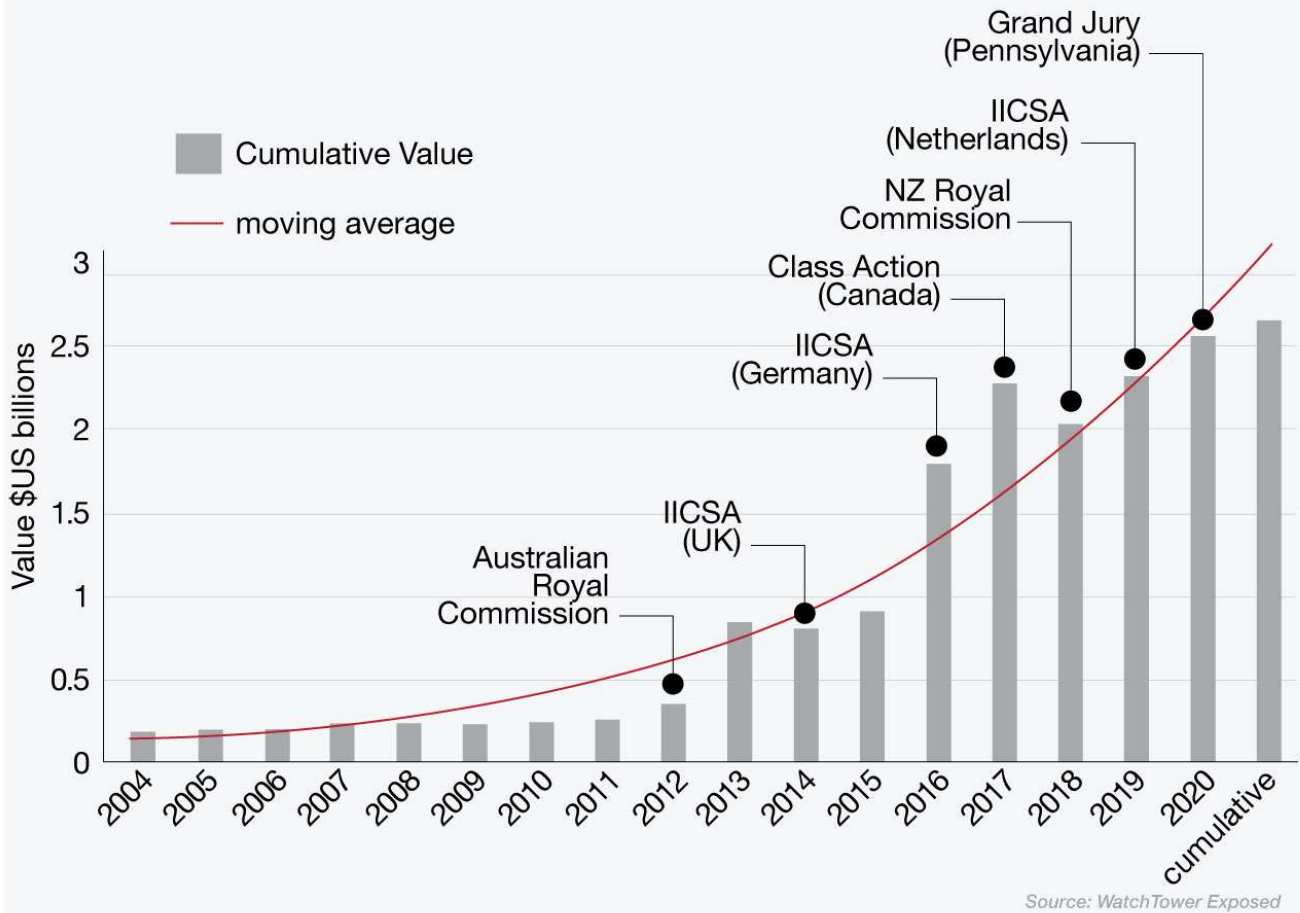
Former New South Wales member Bill Hahn and others around the world including Kim and Mike Brooks in the United States, who run the website Watch Tower Exposed, have worked with them.



Former Jehovah's Witness Larissa Kaput. Picture: Rob Leeson.

Six years ago, Mr and Ms Brooks noticed global property sales for the JW had reached more than \$US2.5 billion (\$A3.65 billion), with sudden spikes in jurisdictions where allegations of child sex abuse had arisen or inquiries were underway.

# Alleged WatchTower Property Sales - Worldwide



The Watch Tower Exposed property sales tracking records, compiled in Australia and the US have been sent to the National Redress Scheme and also the US Grand Jury investigation, which is inquiring into whether the Jehovah's Witnesses repeatedly failed to report child sexual abuse allegations to authorities.



📷 Former JW member Bill Hahn has been compiling financials records about the organisation.





📷 Former JW member Steven Unthank is a co-founder of the Saysorry.org website.

The SaySorry.org group told the Redress Scheme that JW had:

- remained silent in relation to the Redress Scheme,
- refused to join the Redress Scheme,
- refused to meet with survivors,
- shunned child abuse victims within their own religion,
- refused to say sorry for holding the statistical record for having the most child abuse victims per membership number of all institutions within Australia,
- refuse to adopt any Royal Commission recommendations;

They have called for a raft of recommendations including:

- the tax concessions be revoked for all charitable status of all the JW related charities;
- a compliance audit for all JW members and entities working with children;
- implement a redress scheme to pay abuse claimants and then pursue institutions for payment;
- the JW organisations be subject to scrutiny, audit and investigation by ASIC, the ACNC, the AFP, and other federal or state law enforcement agencies.

[Natalie.OBrien@news.com.au](mailto:Natalie.OBrien@news.com.au)

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