



Former Bishop of Broome Christopher Alan Saunders arrives at the West Australian District Court in Perth, Australia, on Aug. 11, 2026. (AP/AAP/Aaron Bunch)

by Associated Press

[View Author Profile](#)

[**Join the Conversation**](#)

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. [Learn more](#)

Perth, Australia — October 7, 2026

[Share on Bluesky](#)[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)

A former [Australian Catholic bishop](#) was sentenced Wednesday to six years and six months in prison for sexually abusing two young Indigenous men.

A District Court of Western Australia state jury convicted [Christopher Saunders](#), 76, in August of 13 out of 19 charges of sexual abuse that occurred between 2008 and 2019 in his sprawling Broome Diocese on the country's tropical northwest coast.

Saunders will become eligible for parole in February 2031.

Saunders was acquitted of six charges involving a third accuser. He was accused of indecent dealing with a child over the age of 16. The age of consent in Western Australia is 16, but the law raises it to 18 if the older person is in a position of trust, power or responsibility.

Four charges involving a child younger than 13 were dropped on the first day of Saunders' three-week trial.

Saunders is one of the most senior Australian Catholics to be convicted in a global clergy abuse scandal that has faced the [Vatican](#) for years.

[Cardinal George Pell](#) was convicted of abusing choirboys, and [Archbishop Philip Wilson](#) was convicted of covering up child sex abuse by a priest. But both clerics successfully appealed their convictions.

Prosecutors alleged Saunders lured young Indigenous men to his church-owned house with alcohol and cigarettes paid for with church funds.

Saunders led the remote Broome Diocese from 1996 until he resigned in 2021. The Outback diocese covers an area larger than France with only 50,000 people. Most of the region's Catholics are Indigenous.

Advertisement

Archbishop Timothy Costelloe, president of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, said the sentence recognized the gravity and serious nature of Saunders' offenses.

The sentence also recognized the profound impact on the victims and survivors of Saunders' crimes, Costelloe said.

"To each victim and survivor who courageously revealed what they had endured, we want to say this: We are sorry for the pain and suffering that was inflicted on you.

We are sorry that your trust was so directly and profoundly betrayed by a leader of the Church," Costelloe said in a statement.

The Vatican began investigating Saunders in 2022, then handed the Western Australia Police Force a report on its findings the following year. Police charged Saunders in 2024.

While the report was never officially made public, the findings were leaked to Australia's Seven Network television news, which reported Saunders likely sexually assaulted four Indigenous youths and potentially groomed another 67 Indigenous youths and men.