



AFL club Western Bulldogs ordered to pay \$5.9m to child sexual abuse victim Adam Kneale

By court reporter [Kristian Silva](#)

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Adam Kneale was subject to abuse when he volunteered at the club as a boy. (ABC News: Russell Jackson)

Quick read

- **In short:** AFL club the Western Bulldogs have been ordered to pay \$5.9 million in compensation to child sexual abuse victim Adam Kneale.
- Mr Kneale was a waterboy when he was abused by club volunteer Graeme Hobbs between 1984 and 1990.
- **What's next?** The club says it will appeal the verdict "as expeditiously as possible".

The Western Bulldogs have been ordered to fork out a \$5.9 million compensation payout to a child sex abuse victim, after a Supreme Court jury ruled the club was negligent and failed to stop a paedophile who preyed on young boys.

After a three-week trial, the jury found in favour of Adam Kneale, who sued the club and claimed it was liable for lifelong damage he sustained at the hands of former Bulldogs volunteer Graeme Hobbs.

Outside court, Mr Kneale told reporters he had waited 30 years for his pain to be recognised, and said he hoped the outcome gave other abuse survivors confidence.

The jury announced it would award \$3.25 million for Mr Kneale's pain and suffering, \$2.6 million for loss of earnings, and a further \$87,000 for medical costs.

The result is likely to cause financial strife for the AFL club, who will need to borrow funds to pay damages, its current chief executive Ameet Bains told the trial.

Lawyer Michael Magazanik, who represented Mr Kneale, said the result should serve as a "lesson" for the club.

"This is the biggest verdict for an abuse survivor in Australian legal history and it's a credit to Adam's guts and perseverance," he said.

"The Western Bulldogs failed Adam as a child — there's no two ways about it — they failed him tragically.

"They let a paedophile ruin his life and this result is what the club deserves for that failure."

In a statement the Western Bulldogs said the club would appeal the verdict "as expeditiously as possible".

"While the club firmly believes it did not breach any duty of care owed to the plaintiff, Mr Adam Kneale, a jury determined otherwise," it said.

"The abuse against Mr Kneale was the subject of a criminal investigation by Victoria Police and relevant authorities in the early 1990s, resulting in several charges being laid, a criminal conviction being sustained, and a subsequent jail sentence being served by the offender.

"The club reiterates its sorrow at the suffering endured by Mr Kneale at the time and acknowledges the pain which he continues to carry as a result of the trauma he has experienced."

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- [Lifeline](#) on 13 11 14
- [Kids Helpline](#) on 1800 551 800
- [Beyond Blue](#) on 1300 224 636
- [Suicide Call Back Service](#) on 1300 659 467
- [Headspace](#) on 1800 650 890
- [MensLine Australia](#) on 1300 789 978

Adam Kneale 'satisfied' with verdict

Hobbs, who is dead, was described as a "sick and disturbed sexual predator" who groomed Mr Kneale and sexually abused him at the club's Whitten Oval headquarters in Footscray and other locations between 1984 and 1990.



Same Hobbs, now dead, was involved in fundraising at the Footscray Football Club in the 1980s and early 2000s. (Supplied)

Mr Kneale, now 51, developed substance addictions, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and anxiety after the abuse, and his lawyers claimed he failed to fulfil his potential in the workplace because of the ordeal.

During the trial, Mr Kneale told the court he was a club waterboy when he first encountered Hobbs, who lured him with money and later exposed him to other paedophile rapists.

"I participated unwillingly, but I felt as though I had to," Mr Kneale said during evidence.

"It was a messed up situation that I'm still struggling to come to terms with."



Adam Kneale departs the Supreme Court in Melbourne after the jury delivered its verdict. (AAP: Emily Woods)

Hobbs, whose nickname was Chops, was known for being a "jack of all trades" in his volunteer role at the club, and witnesses at the trial said he was regularly seen around junior change rooms.

Another witness, who cannot be named for legal reasons, said he too was sexually abused by Hobbs.

Meanwhile, former Bulldogs player Stephen Macpherson said Hobbs was "a pretty sleazy character", while cheer squad member Gary Munn said people "didn't feel safe around him".

After the verdict was handed down, Mr Kneale said he was "satisfied" with the outcome.

"It's been 30 years of waiting for the Bulldogs to recognise what I experienced at their club," he said.

"I believe wholeheartedly that they knew what happened but failed to acknowledge to me the pain that I've endured for the last 30 years.

"With this, I hope it brings confidence to other survivors to come forward and find their own peace of mind and tell their story and to overcome the demons they carry with them every day."

He said being able to share his experiences during the trial was "cathartic".

"I've been through a lot worse than sitting in a witness box telling my story," he said.

Club leaders denied knowing about paedophile's 'hidden evil nature'

Mr Kneale's barrister Tim Hammond said there had been "a catastrophic failure of this football club to actually just see what was right in front of its face for more than a decade".

However club leaders, including former chief executive Dennis Galimberti, denied knowing that Hobbs posed a risk to children.



am Kneale was a club waterboy at the time of the abuse. *(Supplied)*

Mr Galimberti and longtime ex-president Peter Gordon also told the trial they did not see a front page local newspaper story from 1994, which named Hobbs and outlined he was facing court for molesting a young boy at the back of the Whitten Oval grandstand.

Mr Gordon and Mr Bains told the court they only became aware of Hobbs's offending in 2022 when they were contacted by ABC journalist Russell Jackson who was writing a story about Mr Kneale.

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Jack Rush KC, acting for the Bulldogs, denied the club's leaders at the time were negligent and said they couldn't have known about Hobbs's "hidden evil nature".

"It is important to understand the club that existed 40 years ago. It is not BHP, it is not Manchester United, it's a small semi-professional club that existed from hand to mouth over this era of time," he told the jury.

In agonising detail, [Jackson's piece delved into how Mr Kneale's life had been shaped by the abuse he suffered at the hands of Hobbs](#) and other paedophiles, including John Raymond Wayland.

Mr Kneale said it was the birth of his daughter that led him to come forward and report Hobbs to police in the early 1990s.

"She inspired me. I wanted to be an example for her, that you've got to stand up and fight for yourself," he said.

Hobbs died in 2009, aged 63. Wayland was jailed for 16 years by the County Court in 1996, and was living in regional Victoria last year.