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Abuse case judge hoses down row

BYLINE: Kate Hagan

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AN EXPERIENCED County Court judge rebuked for describing a statement by a sexual assault victim as a "waste of time" has publicly softened his stance.

Judge Michael Kelly said yesterday he now accepted the statement was "a truthful account" of how the man perceived the crime's impact on his life.

A County Court judge for 27 years who returned as a reserve judge after retiring, Judge Kelly came under fire last month for questioning the victim's claim that he might not recover from being sexually assaulted by an older man from the age of 13. "He wouldn't have done well in a British public school in the '30s," the judge said.

Judge Kelly, 73, held his ground after being rebuked by the head of Victoria's sexual offences prosecution unit, Michelle Williams, SC, for his comments.

Dean Woodbridge, 30, of Churchill, pleaded guilty to four counts of sexual penetration of a child under 16 and one count of an indecent act with a child under 16. The court heard he was 24 and his victim was 13 when the offences, which carry penalties of up to 15 years' jail, occurred.

Sentencing Woodbridge yesterday, Judge Kelly said the victim had given "a horrific account of his perception of the effect upon him . . . I do not doubt that the statement is a truthful account of the complainant's perceptions of this sexual relationship upon him, although I hope that its more despairing predictions prove to be false."

Judge Kelly said the most salient fact of the case was that both men were profoundly deaf, and therefore socially isolated.

He sentenced Woodbridge to serve two years and nine months' jail, suspended for three years.

In a show of support for Judge Kelly, the Criminal Bar Association of Victoria, of which he is a past chairman, yesterday sent a statement to The Age detailing his "outstanding and massive contribution to criminal law".

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GRAPHIC: PHOTO: Judge Michael Kelly: Toned down earlier comments.

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