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APRIL 13 2017

SAVE PRINT

# Authorities ignored Gold Coast photographer's child sex crimes

Ed Jackson

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Almost 40 years after first admitting his offences, a Gold Coast man has been convicted of sexually abusing a young girl in the late 1970s.

Edward Sawden, 69, was given a wholly suspended two-year prison sentence at the Southport District Court on Thursday after pleading guilty to eight counts of indecent treatment of a child under 16.



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Edward Sawdon appeared in the Southport Magistrates Court on Thursday. Photo: Chris Hyde

Sawden, a surfboard shaper and photographer, who has [work on display at the National Portrait Gallery](#), pleaded guilty to abusing the girl on several occasions between 1977 and 1979.

The ex-competitive surfer admitted to touching and digitally penetrating the girl at several locations including while swimming and in his bed.

She was eight years old when the abuse began, the court heard.

After the girl's mother discovered his abuse, Sawden first confessed to his local church and also admitted he had committed the offences to the Department of Child Services sometime between 1981 and 1982, the court was told

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THE COURT WAS TOLD.



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Despite those revelations, no police investigation into Sawden's activities was launched at the time.

Judge David Kent, who said Sawden's remorse, age, poor health and the time passed since the offending was committed were all factors in his sentence, said the lack of response by authorities was a sign of changing attitudes towards such crimes.

"We forget how much and how quickly society has changed," Judge Kent told the court.

Sawden's barrister Russell Pearce, QC, said the Jehovah's Witness Kingdom Hall at West Burleigh had applied their own punishment to his client following his admissions to them.

Mr Pearce said Sawden had been effectively shunned and publicly shamed by the congregation for over six years after confessing.

"One is really marked," Mr Pearce said of the church's punishment.

"There's been no secret at all in the matter what happened.

"He (Sawden) was publicly shamed for a very significant period of time."

Mr Pearce said his client had shown genuine remorse and had never reoffended in the decades following the abuse.

He said the abuse came at a time when Sawden's life was "unhinged", he was going through an unhappy marriage and he had "craved affection" from the girl.

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