

**INQUIRY INTO UNSOLVED MURDERS AND LONG-TERM
MISSING PERSONS CASES IN NEW SOUTH WALES
BETWEEN 1965 AND 2010**

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Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Unsolved Murders and Long-Term Missing Persons Cases in New South Wales (1965–2010)

Committee: Portfolio Committee No. 1 – Premier and Finance

Introduction

1. I make this submission as the sister of a long-term missing person, Patrick Liedke, who disappeared on 22 April 2024. I am a registered occupational therapist practising in forensic mental health. I make this submission in my personal capacity as a private citizen and family member of a long-term missing person. This submission is written solely in my own right, represents my personal views, and does not represent, reflect, or speak on behalf of my employer, any government department, or any public sector entity.
2. Although Patrick's case falls outside the Inquiry's formal timeframe, the systemic failures experienced by my family reflect investigative deficiencies documented between 1965 and 2010. His case demonstrates that these failures remain current and unresolved.

Summary of Key Issues

2. Despite Patrick's known history of going missing, no preventative plan or coordinated support was implemented by his health-care providers to reduce the risk of further episodes.
3. Significant delays occurred in the initial police response, including failure to act on repeated reports of Patrick's abandoned vehicle.
4. The multi-agency search was prematurely suspended despite evidence suggesting Patrick may still have been alive.
5. Cross-border jurisdictional barriers between NSW and Queensland materially hindered the search.
6. Police decision-making lacked continuity, transparency, and adequate trauma-informed communication with family members.

7. Disability-related stigma influenced community responses and may have affected investigative prioritisation.
8. Families were compelled to advocate publicly and conduct their own searches due to gaps in the official response.
9. Families had limited support and experienced long-standing mental health and legal needs arising from ambiguous loss.
10. Media coverage was inconsistent, and harmful social media activity caused additional distress.

Relevance to the Terms of Reference

11. The Committee is tasked with examining unsolved murders and long-term missing persons cases between 1965 and 2010, and other related matters. Patrick's case is relevant under this latter category, as it evidences the persistence of systemic issues identified in earlier decades.

Evidence of Systemic Failures

Known History of Going Missing

12. Patrick had a known history of going missing, yet no preventative plan, risk-management strategy, or coordinated support response was developed by his health-care providers. Despite clear indicators of vulnerability, no action was taken to reduce the likelihood of future episodes or to ensure his safety. He was discharged from hospital on 16 April 2024 without a risk plan addressing his missing-person history, even though he had previously gone missing in Cobaki on 15 November 2023.

Delayed or Insufficient Early Investigation

13. Patrick's abandoned vehicle was reported on 23, 24, and 25 April 2024, yet no action was taken by police until 25 April 2024.
14. A Missing Person Alert was not issued until 12:13 pm on 25 April 2024, despite Patrick being reported missing on 23 April 2024. Two eyewitnesses saw Patrick on 24 April 2024 but did not report this to police; they may have done so had they been aware he was missing. These combined delays significantly reduced the likelihood of locating him alive.

Premature Suspension of Searches

15. The multi-agency search was suspended after five days, despite footprints being located by myself and a police dog.

16. NSW Police advised that survivability was “indefinite,” yet no additional resources such as night searches or extended teams were deployed.

Cross-Border Jurisdictional Barriers

17. NSW and Queensland police dogs were unable to cross state borders, fragmenting the search effort.
18. I was required to liaise separately with both jurisdictions and provide items to each corresponding police force.
19. Critical digital evidence i.e. Google account activity was acted upon by Queensland Police but not by NSW Police.

Communication Failures

20. I received inconsistent information regarding the date of Patrick’s last confirmed sighting.
21. I was denied access to the survivability report.
22. I was initially asked to provide a formal statement; then later told I could only submit a victim impact statement. Attempts to provide a statement were met with comments such as “You don’t trust me,” requiring me to justify my involvement.

Discrimination and Stigma

23. I believe that stigma and assumptions about mental illness adversely influenced community cooperation and may also have affected investigative prioritisation.

Families Compelled to Advocate and Conduct Searches

24. Due to gaps in the official response, I became an unpaid investigator, search coordinator, searcher, media spokesperson, and advocate.
25. I sustained physical injuries during community-led searches, including a fall requiring emergency services and hospitalisation.
26. The community and I continued searching for Patrick for an extended period, resulting in prolonged collective trauma and significant emotional strain.

Legal and Mental Health Needs

27. The family had ongoing legal and mental health support needs due to the ambiguous loss associated with Patrick’s disappearance.

Media Issues

28. The family observed a significant discrepancy in the level of media reporting across different missing persons cases and was concerned that Patrick, as a disabled man, did

not receive the same level of exposure or public attention. This disparity may have adversely affected community awareness and the overall search effort.

29. The family received distressing and false information through social media, including an AI-generated video about Patrick. This caused significant harm and demonstrated the need for stronger protections against online misinformation in missing persons cases.

Recommendations

Preventative Measures

30. Establish a Preventative Taskforce to identify and address risk factors associated with missing persons cases, incorporating police, hospitals, general practitioners, and allied health services to deliver early intervention, disability-informed support, and coordinated community-based prevention strategies.

Mandatory Early Response Protocols

31. Implement standardised rapid-deployment procedures for high-risk missing persons.

Search Continuity Standards

32. Introduce minimum timeframes and criteria before suspending searches, particularly in bushland environments.

Cross-Border Coordination Framework

33. Create a formal cross-border missing persons taskforce to eliminate jurisdictional barriers.

Technology Access Reform

34. Establish mechanisms requiring telecommunications and technology companies to expedite access to critical location data.

Disability-Informed Practice

35. Introduce mandatory disability-informed and stigma-aware practices within all missing persons investigations, including training for police and emergency services to prevent discriminatory assumptions and ensure equitable prioritisation, response, and community engagement.

Cold Case & Long-Term Missing Review Unit

36. Establish a permanent independent unit to review all missing persons cases and provide ongoing search support, ensuring continuity of active search efforts rather than limiting its role to preparing matters for the Coroner.

Ongoing Support for Families

37. Appoint dedicated family liaison officers with mandatory communication obligations and trauma-informed practice.
38. Ensure families have access to free legal and mental health support throughout the investigative process, including trauma-informed legal assistance to prepare and submit statements independently of police involvement.

Media Standards

39. Implement national media standards for reporting on missing persons, modelled on the Mindframe guidelines, to ensure accurate, non-stigmatising, and responsible coverage that supports public cooperation and protects the dignity of missing persons and their families.

Conclusion

40. Patrick's case demonstrates that the systemic issues identified between 1965 and 2010 remain unresolved. I thank the Committee for examining this critical issue and hope these insights assist in improving outcomes for missing persons and their families.

Permissions and Confidentiality

41. I consent to this submission being published with my name.

Nicole Liedke

Sister of long-term missing person, Patrick Liedke