

**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 NSW Parliamentary Inquiry

Unsolved Murders and Long-Term Missing Persons Cases

Submitted to: NSW Legislative Council Portfolio Committee No. 1 – Premier and Finance

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Brother and sister of Janine Vaughan.

Date: 31st March 2026

1. Purpose of this Submission

This submission is made in relation to the disappearance of our sister, Janine Vaughan, who went missing in Bathurst, New South Wales in December 2001 and has never been found.

The purpose of this submission is not to apportion blame but to highlight systemic issues that can arise in long-term missing persons investigations, particularly in regional communities.

It is hoped that this inquiry will assist in identifying ways to strengthen investigative processes so that unresolved cases such as this may one day be solved.

2. Background: The Disappearance of Janine Vaughan

Janine disappeared in Bathurst in the early hours of 7 December 2001 after leaving a nightclub and accepting a lift home from an unknown person in a red car.

Despite extensive searches, a number of strike forces, a Police Integrity Commission Inquiry and a Coronial Inquest, Janine has never been located and no person has been charged with her disappearance.

3. Regional Investigation Challenges

Investigations occurring in regional communities can present unique challenges.

In towns such as Bathurst, inquiries often explore whether community dynamics may have affected the willingness of individuals to come forward with information. In smaller communities people may know one another socially or professionally, which can create reluctance to speak openly with investigators.

Witnesses may also fear social consequences, community backlash, or involvement in lengthy investigations. In some cases, important information only emerges years later once

circumstances change and individuals feel more comfortable speaking about what they may have seen or heard.

The reputation of the regional police can play a large factor in witnesses' willingness to come forward. In the case of our sister, the fall out from the Wood Royal Commission which revealed systemic corruption in the police force, including in some cases, in Bathurst as well as the reputation of local police meant that there was an innate distrust in some circles of the community of the police. We strongly believe this impacted people's willingness to come forward with information.

4. Police Integrity Commission Inquiry (RANI Report)

A Police Integrity Commission inquiry examined aspects of the early investigation into Janine's disappearance. The inquiry findings became commonly known as the RANI Report.

The investigation identified a number of serious flaws in the early handling of the case. These include the destruction of a potential murder weapon without being forensically tested, despite it being tagged for testing in relation to Janine's case. The destruction without testing of a knife that was confiscated from a person of interest in Janine's case. Allegations of changed witness statements and a detective who was on probation and desk duties facing criminal charges, actively running our sister's case.

The findings also highlighted the flaws in the Eagle.i Investigation Management System that was used by the NSW police at the time where information failed to be connected to Janine's case in the early days resulting in missed opportunities.

Despite these findings and others, none of the recommendations arising from the RANI inquiry were ultimately implemented.

The fact that an independent integrity body identified investigative shortcomings but that its recommendations were not taken up raises important questions about oversight, accountability and the ability of investigative systems to learn from past mistakes.

Consideration of these issues may be relevant to this parliamentary inquiry when examining whether systemic reforms are required to improve the handling of serious investigations in the future.

5. Areas of Concern Raised During Research

A number of concerns have been raised by witnesses and family members regarding aspects of the original investigation.

These include concerns about lost evidence, witness statements that may not accurately reflect recollections, early investigative oversight issues and questions surrounding the role of regional investigative structures.

The family has also sought modern forensic analysis of CCTV footage from the night of Janine Vaughan's disappearance. Specialist laboratories advise that meaningful analysis requires access to the original master recording. The family has been unable to obtain access to the master tape, preventing modern forensic analysis of potentially important visual evidence.

6. Communication with the Family

Our family has deep concern about the quality of communication between investigators and the family over many years.

Our family's interactions with investigators as inconsistent and at times distressing or destructive rather than supportive.

For example, when a one million dollar reward was announced and media reports stated that a vehicle connected to the investigation had been tested for DNA using new forensic methods, however we were not subsequently provided with any meaningful update regarding the outcome of that testing.

We have also assembled a team assisting them in reviewing witness statements and evidence in the case. However, when requests are made for documents or information that could assist in understanding the investigation, those requests are frequently refused.

7. Ongoing Concerns About Case Status

More than twenty years after Janine Vaughan disappeared, the case appears to exist in an ambiguous position between an active investigation and a cold case.

We have been told the case is not currently undergoing any active investigation, yet it has not formally been transferred to a specialist cold case review team. This situation creates a difficult dynamic where we feel compelled to undertake our own searches and investigative work because if we do not, it appears no one is.

8. Opportunities for Future Investigative Approaches

Measures that may assist in resolving cold cases include enhanced resourcing for cold case units, periodic independent reviews, improved witness support, greater use of modern forensic technology and ongoing engagement with families.

9. Utilising the Experience of Retired Detectives

One reform that may assist is the structured use of experienced retired detectives who still wish to contribute to investigative work.

Many highly skilled detectives retire with decades of experience. Their expertise is often lost even though many remain willing to assist investigations. A structured program allowing retired detectives to assist cold case squads could provide valuable expertise and ensure the burden of investigating cold cases does not fall on families.

10. Possible Reopening of the Coronial Inquest

Our family believes there may be grounds for reopening the original coronial inquest into Janine Vaughan's disappearance.

This view is based on concerns regarding aspects of the police investigation, the emergence of new information over time and perceived limitations in the previous coronial proceedings.

If significant new information or investigative concerns are identified, mechanisms allowing families to seek the reopening of coronial inquests may provide an important pathway toward renewed scrutiny.

Appendix A – Summary of Key Concerns

- Concerns regarding the loss or disappearance of potential evidence.
- Witness statements that may not fully reflect recollections.
- Questions regarding investigative oversight in the early stages of the case.
- Findings from the Police Integrity Commission (RANI Report) identifying flaws in the early investigation.
- Limited access to the original CCTV master recording for modern forensic analysis.
- Uncertainty regarding whether the case has been formally transferred to a specialist cold case unit and whether there is currently any active investigation.
- Poor communication between investigators and the family.
- Our belief that new information may justify reopening the coronial inquest.

Closing Statement From Adam Vaughan

I was 19 years old when my sister Janine disappeared. Old enough to understand what was happening, but not old enough to know how to live with it.

Losing a sibling in this way is not something you ever come to terms with. It is not a moment in time—it is something that reshapes your entire life. Janine wasn't just my sister. She was part of

my everyday world, my memories, and my future. And then suddenly, she was gone, and nothing has ever felt whole since.

For more than two decades, I have lived with a constant sense of incompleteness. There has been no ability to properly grieve, because grief needs truth, and we have never been given that. Instead, there has only been uncertainty, questions, and the ongoing weight of not knowing what happened to someone you love.

What makes that grief even harder to carry is the knowledge that this was not just a tragedy—it was also a failure.

The nightmare began for us on December 7, 2001, when Janine left a night club in Bathurst in the early hours of the morning. Witnesses say she got into a red car. She has never been seen again. Her body never been found and her killer never been brought to justice.

The early investigation into Janine's disappearance was marked by serious shortcomings. Evidence that should have been preserved and tested was not. Lines of inquiry that should have been pursued were missed. Findings from an independent integrity body identified these failures, yet its recommendations were not implemented.

That represents a failure not just of individuals, but of the system itself.

When institutions fail in this way, the consequences do not disappear over time. They are lived every day by families like mine. As a brother, I have had to carry not only the loss of my sister, but the enduring question of whether she might have been found if those first critical hours and days had been handled differently.

That is a burden no family should have to bear.

There is also a unique pain in watching life continue without her. Birthdays, milestones, ordinary family moments—they all go on, but always with a space where Janine should be. That absence does not fade. It becomes part of who you are.

And with time, that pain has only grown more urgent.

We have already lost our mother at the age of 61, without her ever getting answers about what happened to her daughter. That is something no parent should have to endure. Our father is now nearing his 80s, and we live with the very real fear that he too may not see resolution in his lifetime.

The uncertainty, the waiting, the not knowing—it is not just grief, it is a form of ongoing torture that has been carried by our entire family for more than twenty years.

This submission is not about personal blame, but it must be about institutional accountability. When serious investigative failures are identified, they must lead to action. When recommendations are made, they must be implemented. And when systems fall short, there must be transparency, oversight, and a genuine commitment to doing better.

In our case, that did not happen.

Instead, our family has had to step into roles we were never meant to take on—advocates, investigators, and voices for our sister—because too often it has felt like the system stepped back, and we were left to carry the responsibility ourselves.

The painful truth is that we are the last people, the police will share information with and yet we are the only ones now searching for Janine. We are told by the police that our involvement will “contaminate” the case—but what are we supposed to do? The brick wall of silence is damaging to our mental health. We can’t just sit back and we never will.

The system is broken. Dangerous murderers roam free having got away with taking precious lives and never ever doing time for it.

At 19, I believed there would be answers. I believed the system would work, that those responsible would be held to account, and that my sister would be brought home. More than twenty years later, we are still waiting.

All we have ever wanted is the truth. A chance to grieve properly. A chance to bring our sister home.

This inquiry now has an opportunity—and a responsibility—to ensure that what happened in this case is not repeated. That institutional failures are not only acknowledged but addressed. That recommendations are not ignored. And that no other family is left to live for decades with unanswered questions, compounded by the knowledge that more could have been done.

Because the reality is, time is not neutral in cases like this. Every year that passes without answers deepens the harm. Every delay risks another family member never seeing justice.

For Janine, for our mother who never got answers, for our father who is still waiting, and for every family living this same reality—we ask for more than recognition.

We ask for accountability, for reform, and for a system that does not fail the people it is meant to protect.