

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

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Partially
Confidential

1. Executive Summary

This submission concerns the case of Janine Mary Vaughan, who was abducted and likely murdered in Bathurst, New South Wales, on 7 December 2001.

The case remains unsolved more than two decades later. It raises serious concerns about:

- The adequacy of the initial police response
- Missed investigative opportunities
- Limitations in resources and specialist support, particularly in regional areas
- A lack of consistent communication and transparency with affected families
- The need to re-evaluate existing evidence, including CCTV footage, using modern techniques

This submission argues that systemic reform is required to improve investigative standards, accountability, and resourcing in missing and murdered persons cases. Without such reform, similar failures may continue to occur.

2. Purpose of Submission

The purpose of this submission is to:

- Highlight investigative and systemic issues evident in this case
- Outline the impact of these issues on families and communities
- Provide recommendations to improve future responses to missing and murdered persons cases

3. Background: Case Overview

On 7 December 2001, at 3:47am, Janine Mary Vaughan disappeared after witnesses claim they saw Janine getting into a red vehicle in Keppel Street Bathurst, NSW.

Her disappearance is widely believed to have involved foul play.

Despite extensive investigations, public appeals, and reviews over many years, no person has been held accountable for her murder.

The prolonged nature of this case suggests that early investigative shortcomings may have significantly affected the likelihood of resolution.

4. Key Issues Identified

4.1 Initial Police Response

- The early response appears to have lacked urgency consistent with a high-risk missing persons case
- There may have been delays in recognising the likelihood of a serious criminal offence
- Opportunities for early intervention, witness identification, and evidence collection may have been missed

4.2 Investigation and Evidence Handling

- Concerns exist regarding the thoroughness and direction of the investigation
- Key leads and persons of interest may not have been pursued with sufficient rigour
- Any deficiencies in early evidence collection are likely to have had long-term consequences

Original CCTV footage may not have been fully or effectively analysed, and there is a strong need for this material to be re-examined using modern investigative techniques and technology.

- I have carefully studied this case and personally viewed sections of the available CCTV footage and, in my view, there is significantly more information contained within it than has been carefully examined or acted upon. The CCTV has not been carefully reexamined since 2006.
- This raises concerns that potentially valuable visual evidence has not been subject to sufficiently detailed or ongoing analysis

4.3 Communication with Family

- Families in long-term cases often report inconsistent or limited communication
- A lack of transparency regarding investigative progress contributes to distress and frustration
- It is unclear whether structured, ongoing family liaison support was consistently provided

4.4 Resourcing and Regional Disparities

- Regional investigations may not receive the same level of sustained resourcing as metropolitan cases
- Access to specialised units, forensic services, and analytical tools may be limited
- Cold case investigations are resource-intensive and may not be adequately funded

5. Systemic Concerns

This case illustrates broader systemic issues, including:

- Absence of nationally consistent protocols for high-risk missing persons cases
- Delays in escalating cases to homicide or major crime investigations
- Limited independent oversight of investigative quality and outcomes
- Insufficient long-term case management frameworks
- Inequitable distribution of policing resources, particularly affecting regional communities

6. Impact

The consequences of these issues are significant:

- Families experience prolonged grief, uncertainty, and lack of closure
- Communities may lose confidence in law enforcement and feel unsafe
- Justice outcomes are compromised when offenders are not identified or held accountable

7. Recommendations

7.1 Early Response and Investigation

- Implement mandatory risk assessment frameworks for all missing persons reports
- Require immediate escalation of high-risk cases to specialist units
- Establish national minimum standards for evidence collection and investigative procedures

7.2 Oversight and Accountability

- Create an independent review body for unsolved missing and murdered persons cases
- Introduce mandatory periodic case reviews
- Provide for transparent reporting of review outcomes, where appropriate

7.3 Resources and Capability

- Increase funding for dedicated missing persons and cold case units
- Expand access to forensic technologies and analytical tools
- Strengthen cross-jurisdictional data sharing systems

7.4 Family Support

- Assign dedicated family liaison officers in all cases
- Require regular, structured updates to families
- Provide access to counselling and support services

7.5 Training and Culture

- Implement trauma-informed policing practices
- Provide specialised training in complex missing persons and homicide investigations
- Promote a culture of accountability and continuous review

8. Conclusion

The case of Janine Mary Vaughan demonstrates the long-term consequences of investigative shortcomings and systemic gaps. While the case itself remains unresolved, it provides critical lessons for improving the handling of missing and murdered persons investigations.

This inquiry presents an opportunity to implement reforms that ensure:

- Timely and effective investigations
- Greater accountability
- Improved support for families
- Better resourcing across all jurisdictions

Without such changes, similar cases may continue to result in unresolved outcomes and enduring harm to families and communities.