

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

Name: Mrs Mindy Wicks
Date Received: 29 March 2026

Partially
Confidential

22nd March 2026

COMMITTEE: Portfolio Committee No. 1 - Premier and Finance

RE: Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Unsolved murders and long-term missing persons cases in New South Wales between 1965 and 2010

1. Introduction

I am making this submission as the long-term family friend of an UNSOLVED HOMICIDE victim, as well as the best friend of a MISSING PERSON.

In 2001, RACHELLE CHILDS was murdered; 25 years later her homicide remains unsolved.

In 2018 and 2025, my best friend LUKE BARTLEY went missing; he was missing for a total of 8 days.

2. Summary of Key Points

2.1 Police reluctance in taking a Police Report and providing an Event Number

BARTLEY: When Mr BARTLEY went missing August of 2025, I personally attended a NSW Police Station and advised the Officer of Duty that I wanted to officially report a 'Missing Person'; I provided the Officer all relevant information required to submit the report, including a full description and photographs of Mr BARTLEY, his vehicles, and any belongings that could not be located within his home.

Note: After providing the Officer on Duty with a detailed physical description of Mr BARTLEY – particularly his height – he made the following comment: "Yeah wow; He's a big guy; I'm sure he can take care of himself".

Mr BARTLEY is 6'4, he is approx. 100kgs and has a beard.

My response to the Officer on Duty, was: "Yeah, well I am 4'11, approx. 70kgs, and covered in tattoos. I too can hold my own when backed into a corner, but that means f##k all, when I'm emotionally broken, in a bad head space, and running away from my family. Appearance means nothing, when dealing with a Missing Person".

When asked why I was the person making the report, and not his wife and/or family, I explained Mr BARTLEY'S wife was at home with their 2 young children, distraught, and unable to cope with being the one to officially report him missing, Mr BARTLEY'S parents and siblings did not live close by, and that I am regarded as Mr BARTLEY'S best friend, 'the person he goes to, when he is not coping well'.

I outlined Mr BARTLEY'S ongoing mental health struggles, expressed a genuine concern for his safety, and emphasised the urgent need to locate him, noting that failure to do so could likely result in him taking his own life.

Once I finalised providing all relevant information, I asked for an Event Number; the Officer on Duty advised that he was not able to provide me with an Event Number, as they would need to upload all of the information at a later time, and once completed, an Event Number would be provided to myself and Mr BARTLEY'S wife, later that day.

It then took a further 2-3 days before NSW Police contacted Mr BARTLEY'S wife to confirm he was in fact 'a missing person' and officially file a Missing Person's Report to provide her with the relevant Event Number.

2.2 Police losing Critical Evidence relating to a Homicide Investigation

CHILDS: Key CCTV footage obtained by NSW Police during the investigation into the murder of Ms CHILDS was subsequently lost.

2.3 Lack of urgency to Obtain and/or Review Key Evidence

MULTIPLE CASES: Multiple families I have spoken with (and assisted in reinvestigating their loved ones case) have experienced delays in police obtaining and/or reviewing key evidence, including instances where such evidence was ultimately lost.

2.4 Cross Contamination of Evidence

CHILDS: Forensic analysis of key evidence obtained during the initial homicide investigation into Ms CHILDS identified an unknown male DNA profile; this profile was subsequently confirmed to belong to one of the NSW Police investigating officers.

2.5 Police making assumptions relating to Missing Persons

BARTLEY: When speaking with NSW Police during the investigation into Mr BARTLEY's whereabouts, both myself and Mr BARTLEY's wife, were advised 'he is probably just taking some much-needed time out' and that we should 'give him a few days to cool off, and come home'; NSW Police also claimed that 'he may not want to come home, knowing what he's going to have to deal with when he gets here, because you 2 keep hassling him to come home, and won't just leave him be, for a few days'.

2.6 Budget Constraints

MULTIPLE CASES: While the public is advised that 'Budget Constraints' do not hinder or impede on a Missing Person and/or Homicide Investigation, multiple families I have spoken to, and assisted with reinvestigating their loved ones case, have expressed being told that certain lines of enquiry cannot be completed, and/or continued, due to 'exceeding the budget' on their relevant loved ones case.

2.7 CCTV footage not shared with family, during the initial Investigation

CHILDS: Key CCTV footage obtained by NSW Police during the investigation into the murder of Ms CHILDS was not shared with her family and/or friends during the initial stages of the investigation.

Ultimately, you have Police reviewing key evidence of a potential suspect and/or victim, that they know little about. Sharing such footage with family and/or friends of the Missing or Murdered Person, could lead to faster and more reliable identification of the person, thereby ruling evidence 'in' and/or 'out' of an investigation.

2.8 Issues with 'Cross Border' and 'Multi Jurisdiction' Policing with Missing Person and Homicide cases

BARTLEY: 3 days into searching for Mr BARTLEY, I received a call from a member of the public, confirming they had sighted him at a Pawn Shop in QLD; I immediately called NSW Police to advise them of the confirmed sighting, and was advised they would contact QLD Police to request their assistance, but given they have no jurisdiction over QLD, they would be dependent on the availability of QLD Police to attend any locations where Mr BARTLEY has been reliably sighted; they advised they would keep us informed of any progress.

While awaiting updates from NSW Police, I continued reaching out to local businesses, Facebook groups, and caravan parks around Mr BARTLEY'S confirmed sighting to maximise public awareness and encourage vigilance for him, his vehicle, or his boat. It became a continual "cat and mouse" situation, as he moved between locations in an apparent effort to avoid being located.

With each new confirmed sighting, I contacted NSW Police to provide them with the most up to date information on Mr BARTLEY'S whereabouts; NSW Police advised that I needed to stop interfering with their investigation, and that my continued involvement, meant that Mr BARTLEY kept changing locations, and I was making it almost impossible for them to provide QLD Police with a location to attend. I advised NSW Police, that they would not even have a location if it were not for myself and the public doing everything in their power to try and locate Mr BARTLEY. I further expressed concern with the time in which it took NSW Police to discuss a confirmed sighting with QLD Police, as by the time we hear back from them (NSW Police), Mr BARTLEY had already moved on to a different location/suburb across QLD.

CHILDS: Ms CHILDS resided in Bargo, NSW, and was reported missing by friends and family in Camden, NSW; she was later found deceased on Crooked River Road, Gerroa, NSW.

Given Ms CHILDS was located deceased within the Lake Illawarra LAC, they held Jurisdiction over the Homicide Investigation; however, Ms CHILDS lived and worked within the Camden PAC, as well as her friends, family and associates; Ms CHILDS vehicle, which was suspected as being a potential crime scene, was located at the Bargo Hotel, which is also within the Camden PAC.

2.9 Dismissal of families' voices and lived experience

BARTLEY: Once Mr BARTLEY had been located by QLD Police, they had a Mental Health Assessment completed by QLD Health; Mr BARTLEY was asked about his previous and current state of mind, and advised both QLD Police and QLD Health that he had ongoing Mental Health issues, but that he was 'OK'; he presented QLD Health with an (esky type) bag containing his medication, and advised that he had been taking his regular medication, as normal; Neither QLD Police nor QLD Health conducted any investigation into the validity of Mr BARTLEY'S claims that he had in fact been taking his medication.

Upon receiving this advice, QLD Health made the determination that Mr BARTLEY was in a 'Good Mental State' and was not at risk of 'Self Harm', despite NSW Police locating 3 letters written by Mr BARTLEY to his wife, daughter, and son, expressing his deep regret in 'needing to leave them' and 'not being there to watch his children grow up', just days earlier.

Both NSW and QLD Police advised that given the abovementioned determination by QLD Health, they had no option but to allow Mr BARTLEY to leave, and that he was no longer considered a Missing Person, as he had been sighted and spoken to by QLD Police, and subsequently confirmed as 'OK' by QLD Health; QLD and NSW Police then explained that they do not have the power to override a determination made by QLD Health, and despite their beliefs that Mr BARTLEY was 'not in a good way', they do not have the authority to make a determination on someone's mental health, and therefore, cannot assist further.

2.11 Obtaining information from a Coronial Inquest once completed

CHILDS: Ms CHILDS mother (SNOK) and sister have been trying to obtain all relevant material relating to the coronial inquest into the murder of Ms CHILDS. NSW Police have agreed to allow Ms CHILDS sister and/or mother to view the Brief of Evidence (only), at the Coroners Court of NSW. Despite this, the Crooners Court of NSW has not provided Ms CHILDS sister with a suitable time to do so, despite following up on multiple occasions.

2.12 Collection of Key Evidence

MULTIPLE CASES: Multiple families I have spoken with (and assisted in reinvestigating their loved ones case) have raised concerns that NSW Police failed to collect key evidence.

CHILDS: Ms CHILDS vehicle was long considered a potential crime scene, in her Homicide Investigation. During our reinvestigation, we requested assistance from Search Dogs Sydney (SDS) to conduct a search on Ms CHILDS vehicle, in the hope of confirming whether Ms CHILDS had been in her car, after she was deceased.

During the search, the fuel cap door was opened to review whether the fuel cap had signs of being fingerprinted during the initial investigation; upon viewing the internal fuel cap bay, a SDS representative with extensive fingerprint knowledge and experience advised that there was a lack of evidence that the fuel cap had in fact been tested. Ms CHILDS sister contacted Unsolved Homicide to confirm whether the fuel cap had been forensically tested and was advised that police were unable to confirm whether such testing had been conducted or to rule out that it had not.

The fuel cap was then seized by NSW Police for forensic testing; at this time, Ms CHILDS sister asked NSW Police if she would receive the fuel cap back after the relevant forensic testing was completed, to which she was advised no – all evidence seized for testing, remains in the possession of NSW Police, as evidence.

Considering the above, one can only assume, that the fuel cap had not been forensically tested during the initial investigation considering that, up until that point, the fuel cap was in the possession of Ms CHILDS sister, on Ms CHILDS vehicle.

2.13 Police unsupportive of families seeking assistance from the media (In particular, Creating a Podcast)

MULTIPLE CASES: Multiple families I have spoken to (and assisted with reinvestigating their loved ones case) have expressed concerns with NSW Police advising them engaging the media to create a Podcast, will hinder the investigation, and make it almost impossible to prosecute and convict someone due to their involvement.

CHILDS: Ms CHILDS sister made numerous attempts to follow up NSW Unsolved Homicide, prior to commencing the production of 'Dear Rachelle'; she was consistently advised that while Ms CHILDS case is not actively being investigated, it remains an open case, and that they strongly urge the CHILDS family to avoid engaging the media, to create a podcast.

In June 2024, Unsolved Homicide advised Ms CHILDS sister, that they were actively reviewing Unsolved Cases, to determine whether they are viable to be reinvestigated.

In January 2025 (6 months later) Unsolved Homicide advised Ms CHILDS sister, that a review had not been conducted, and that the review previously mentioned, was to review whether they could conduct a review of Unsolved cases within NSW.

In May 2025 (4 months later), the 'Dear Rachelle' Podcast was released; the same day, Journalist Ashlea Hansen (NewsCorp/True Crime Podcast) contacted Unsolved Homicide for comment; Unsolved Homicide advised Ms Hansen they had been 'actively reinvestigating' Ms CHILDS murder since January 2025, and that 'Strike Force Telap' was officially back in operation.

- **June 2024 advised of the 'review'**
- **Mid-January 2025 advised the 'review' was to 'review whether they could conduct a review of unsolved cases'**
- **May 2025 'Dear Rachelle' Podcast launch**
- **May 2025 advised unsolved have been 'actively reinvestigating' Ms CHILD murder since January 2026**

2.14 Policy and procedure

MULTIPLE CASES: Please refer to Section(s) 3 and 5.

2.15 Failure to subject all evidence (*particularly DNA*) to forensic testing in a homicide investigation

MULTIPLE CASES: Multiple families I have spoken with (and assisted in reinvestigating their loved ones case) have raised concerns that NSW Police failed to test key evidence.

3. Responding to the Terms of Reference

3.1 Historical Investigative Limitations

- Cases investigated between 1965 and 2010 relied on now-outdated forensic methods
- Evidence collection standards were inconsistent or inadequate
- Limited use of forensic preservation techniques, resulting in degraded or unusable evidence
- Absence of early suspect prioritisation frameworks and intelligence systems

3.2 Evidence Loss, Degradation, and Accessibility

- Physical evidence has been lost, destroyed, improperly stored, contaminated due to handling practices
- Lack of centralised evidence tracking systems historically
- Barriers to re-testing evidence using modern forensic techniques

3.3 Data Fragmentation and Information Silos

- Case information is often spread across different police units, Jurisdictions, and legacy record systems (*paper-based record; incompatible databases; Statements provided to an Officer on Duty at a local police station and recorded in a station logbook, remaining unknown to the investigative team assigned to the case*)
- Limited data integration, reducing the ability to identify links between cases
- Inconsistent record digitisation and standardisation

3.4 Resource Constraints and Prioritisation Issues

- Cold cases receive lower priority compared to active investigations (*potentially due to a lack of resources, workload, ongoing crime rates*)
- Limited availability of dedicated cold case investigators and forensic specialists
- Competing operational demands within policing agencies

3.5 Inconsistent Case Review Practices

- No universally applied, mandatory framework for systematic cold case review
- Variability in frequency of reviews, and the depth/methodology of re-investigation
- Cases remain inactive for extended periods without reassessment (*again, potentially due to a lack of resources, workload, ongoing crime rates*)

3.6 Socioeconomic and Systemic Bias

- Historical disparities in media attention and investigative priority
- Disproportionate impact on Indigenous Australians, people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, individuals in regional or remote areas
- Reduced advocacy capacity for (some) families

3.7 Inter-Agency Coordination Challenges

- Deficiencies in coordination across police jurisdictions, law enforcement, and coronial systems
- Delays or barriers in information sharing and collaboration

3.8 Technological Adoption Gaps

- Delayed uptake of emerging technologies in some cases, including (*but not limited to*) DNA re-analysis and digital case management systems
- Lack of retrospective application of modern technologies to older cases
- Resource and training limitations impacting implementation
- Outdated Evidence Management Systems
- Inconsistent CCTV and digital evidence retention

3.9 Legal and Procedural Barriers

- Challenges in reopening cases due to evidentiary thresholds, and securing prosecutions where evidence is circumstantial or aged
- Witness reliability issues due to passage of time, deceased or unavailable witnesses

4. Personal Experience

Through my involvement with the “Dear Rachelle” podcast, and my reinvestigation into the unsolved homicide of Rachelle Childs, I have connected with many families within the Missing and Unsolved community. I have supported a number of these families in researching their loved one’s case and, through this work, gained insight into the ongoing systemic issues they face, which led me to join the Centre for Missing Persons Australia.

Over time, it became apparent that key evidence obtained during the initial stages of an investigation, had either not been preserved adequately, or had been lost. This included material that may have been critical to progressing the matter. The inability to account for such evidence has had a lasting impact on confidence in the investigative process. I have also observed that advancements in forensic science and investigative techniques have not been consistently applied to older cases. Opportunities to revisit evidence using modern methods appear to depend on resourcing or individual initiative, rather than a structured or mandated review process.

The emotional and psychological toll of living without answers cannot be overstated. The absence of resolution continues to affect not only immediate family members, but also the broader community connected to the case.

I have a deep, personal, passion for Missing Persons and Unsolved Homicide cases, due to the many friendships I have formed within this space; I believe that the system needs to change, policies and process must be reviewed, and I am committed to being a part of this change, to ensure that all of our Missing are brought home, and Homicide victims get the justice they deserve.

My passion, commitment, and dedication to the Missing, Murdered, and Unsolved space, allows me to assist with finding information, missing persons, and key evidence previously unknown with unsolved cases.

I have recently joined the Guilt Podcast Research Team, where I have been successful in finding critical evidence, supporting new information obtained by a witness coming forward in relation to 3 long-term Missing Persons cases in QLD; I will continue to be a part of the Guilt Podcast Research Team for future seasons/investigations and continue my studies to obtain my Private Investigators Licence.

For the last 2 years, I have been working on a ‘Find Me File’ in collaboration with the many families I have met through the Missing and Unsolved space, which I have included as part of my submission. The ‘Find Me File’ consists of all relevant information required, when trying to locate a Missing loved one. My hope (*and vision*) is that families can share their loved ones ‘Find Me File’ with Law Enforcement, to assist them with obtaining access to key personal information including (*but not limited to*) Social Media accounts, Phone Records, Email accounts, Health Records.

Everyone Matters. The Missing Matter. Justice for (*all*) our Missing, Long-Term Missing, and Murdered loved ones should never be constrained by resource limitations.

Every single person deserves to be found, and without change, this will never be possible.

5. Identified Gaps, Challenges, and Systemic Issues

- Law Enforcement response and coordination
- ‘Cross-border’ and ‘multi-jurisdiction’ policing for both Missing Person and Homicide investigations
- Information sharing between agencies
- Support for families
- Data collection and reporting
- Media engagement; and unsupportive of families seeking to engage the media to create a Podcast
- Assumptions towards Missing Persons (*mental health; reason for going missing; physical appearance; socioeconomic factors*)
- Legislative barriers (*presumption of death; accessing financial accounts; accessing social media accounts*)
- Mismanagement of key evidence; not collecting key evidence; not testing all available evidence
- Reluctance in sharing information with families
- A lack of resources and workload for Law Enforcement, as well as ongoing crime rates

6. Recommendations

- Establishment of dedicated cold case review frameworks within policing agencies
- Digitise all legacy evidence and case files
- Treat high-risk missing persons cases as potential crimes immediately (*no delay assumptions*)
- Legislative support for post-conviction and historical case reviews
- Standardise risk assessment tools to quickly identify high-risk missing persons cases
- Remove outdated assumptions (*waiting periods for reporting adults missing*)
- Ensure immediate investigative action where vulnerability or suspicious circumstances are present
- Promote a culture that values long-term case resolution, not just short-term clearance rates
- Address unconscious bias that may affect prioritisation of cases (*based on background or lifestyle*)
- Ensure all evidence, statements, and intelligence, are centrally recorded and easily retrievable
- Establish improved Interagency coordination and formal protocols between Law Enforcement, Health Services, Child Protection, Corrections, and Immigration agencies – *ensuring ‘real-time’ data sharing where risk is identified*
- Establish a Government funded ‘Independent National Organisation’ (INO) resourced with Specialist Personnel (*Retired, and/or Ex-Serving Law Enforcement Officers, Private Investigators, Researchers, Analysts, Forensic Specialists*), supported by a centralised database, dedicated to investigating and managing Missing Persons, Unidentified Remains, and Unsolved Homicide cases, and:
 - *Conduct independent reviews and/or audits on Law Enforcement and their investigations, and provide unbiased, public reporting on case review outcomes and systemic issues*
 - *Conduct ongoing analysis on (but not limited to) serial offenders, geographic clusters, linked cases*
- Ongoing Training and Development for Specialised Personnel in (*all*) available technologies like (*but not limited to*) Digital forensics; Cyber evidence handling; Emerging investigative technologies
- Greater emphasis on victim and family engagement policies, including (*but not limited to*) regular updates and transparency – *provide a single point of contact within the INO suggested above*
- Improve public alert systems (*beyond Amber Alerts*); including the use of media and digital platforms more strategically – *to be managed by the INO suggested above*
- Encourage anonymous reporting channels – *to be managed by the INO suggested above*
- Implement ‘Missing Persons Absentia’ laws where, if a person has not been seen or made contact for three or more years, the case is formally declared “Absentia” and relevant personal records are automatically made accessible to their senior next of kin
 - *Under the NSW State Records Act 1998, public offices are required to retain records based on approved ‘Retention and Disposal Authorities’*
 - *Many businesses retain records for a maximum of 5-7 years; at which point they may be lawfully destroyed, resulting in the loss of vital evidence for affected families*
- Establish a standardised National Reward Scheme for (*all*) Missing Person, Homicide and Unsolved cases, indexed annually to the Consumer Price Index (*CPI*)
- Mandate ‘Automatic Presentation Flags’ on all Personal Records once a case is classified as Missing, Homicide, Suspicious, and/or Unsolved
- Mandate minimum retention periods (*180 days*) for all CCTV footage, Home Security Systems, Camera Doorbells, Key Infrastructure (*transport hubs, highways*) footage
 - *Prohibit the destruction of CCTV, Forensic Material, Call Data, and Agency-held Records for Missing and Unsolved Cases*
 - *Introduce penalties or oversight for premature destruction of evidentiary material*
 - *Establish rapid-response protocols to secure footage immediately after a report*
- Standardise the use of Forensic Investigative Genetic Genealogy (*FIGG*) across (*all*) available platforms – *both National and International*
- Implement ongoing legislative reform to align laws with modern forensic advancements and digital evidence practice

6. Recommendations – Continued

- Increased recognition of Missing Persons as potential Homicide cases earlier in investigations
- Policy discussions around retention and re-testing of forensic evidence
- Establish a (*mandatory*) ‘National Missing Persons and Unidentified Remains Matching’ protocol
 - *Automatic comparison of all unidentified human remains against missing persons databases*
 - *Integration with DNA, dental, and biometric system*
 - *Routine automated re-matching triggered by the addition of new data*
 - *Routine DNA analysis across genealogy-based databases like (but not limited to), GEDmatch, FamilyTreeDNA, Ancestry*
- Establish a National standard on ‘Whistleblower Protections’ for investigative misconduct and/or negligence of Law Enforcement, Independent Organisations (*as per the INO suggested above*), Analysts, or external personnel who raise concerns about, (*but not limited to*):
 - *Mishandling of cases*
 - *Failures in evidence preservation*
 - *Investigative standards*
- Mandate robust ‘Investigative Accountability and Audit Trail’ protocols, requiring all investigations to maintain a comprehensive, auditable decision log, including (*but not limited to*):
 - *Key investigative decisions and rationale*
 - *Lines of inquiry pursued or discontinued*
 - *Evidence handling records*
 - *Documented evidence of all actions (required; completed; incomplete)*
- Apply a practical, ‘Common Sense’ approach to how Missing Persons, Long-Term Missing Persons, Homicides, and Unsolved cases ‘are’ and ‘should be’ Investigated and Managed
 - *Then apply the same practical, ‘Common Sense’ evidence-based approach when developing or reforming relevant legislation and governing agency frameworks*

7. Conclusion

These gaps and systemic issues highlight the need for coordinated reform, sustained resourcing, and consistent application of modern investigative approaches. Addressing these challenges is critical to improving outcomes in Missing, Long-Term Missing, and Unsolved Murder cases and ensuring equitable access to justice.

I thank the Committee for examining this critical issue and trust that these insights will assist in improving outcomes for Missing Persons and Long-Term Missing Persons their families, as well as Unsolved Homicide investigations.

8. Redactions Required

- Section 2.10 – Withholding and/or not providing families with the full Brief of Evidence (*Coronial Inquest*)
 - *The information contained within this section has the potential to significantly impact the outcome of the active investigation into the murder of Rachelle Childs and must therefore be fully redacted*

9. Permissions and Confidentiality Signature

I consent to the publication of this submission under my name, subject to appropriate redactions, and would welcome the opportunity to appear before the Committee to discuss my submission further or provide additional information if required.

10. Signature