

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

Name: Mrs Sally Leydon

Date Received: 24 March 2026

Submission to the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into Unsolved murders and long-term missing persons cases in NSW between 1965 -2010.

Case of Missing Mother: Marion **BARTER** – AKA Florabella Natalia Marion REMAKEL

That Portfolio Committee No. 1 – Premier and Finance inquire into and report on unsolved murders and long-term missing persons cases in New South Wales between 1965 and 2010...

*This submission addresses the **Terms of Reference** as follows:*

- (a) Policy, practice and technology: Police failures, DNA/UHR reform, recommendations*
- (b) Impediments in the criminal justice system: Entire case history, police handling, coronial findings*
- (c) Geographic clusters and links specific to my mum's case: Northern NSW movements (Ballina, Byron Bay, Grafton, Yamba)*
- (d) Progress of investigation over the past 29 years: Full police timeline, failures, inquest findings*
- (e) Other related matters including: Family impact, systemic reform proposals, lived experience*

My name is Sally Leydon. I am the daughter of long-term missing mother, Marion BARTER (AKA Florabella Natalia Marion REMAKEL) missing 10,585 days, she matters.

Please take time to read about my 29-year journey to find my missing mum. It is not a journey I can simply jot down onto a one-page document. The information in this submission is FACT. It gives you, the reader, insight into what we know happened to my mum, what police have or more appropriately 'have not', done. A broader understanding of what we, myself and the community helping me, have found and what action still needs to be taken. Insight into how I, the daughter of a missing woman, has been treated by authorities over these past 29 years and the lasting impact it has had on me mentally and physically.

I have also included my opinions of what needs to change within the NSW Police Force and NSW coronial process based on my own personal experiences and what actions I believe should be taken without further push back or delay. I am also taking this opportunity to express my ideas on what changes could be implemented to improve this broken system.

Writing this submission has been extremely stressful, pulling myself all the way back to 1997 and rolling through the trauma of it all, yet again, but I see value in sharing my journey openly and honestly. I advocate so that the hard-learned lessons of our pass can spare future families from the same suffering.

Timelines solve cases!

An award winning school teacher, my mum resigned from her teaching position at the prestigious 'Southport School', referred to as TSS, on Friday **20th June 1997** and flew out of Brisbane International airport on **Sunday 22nd June 1997** on Korean Air flight 814 to South Korea for what she told us all was to be the 'trip of a lifetime'.

Prior to her leaving, mum paid her teacher's registration for 1998 in advance and left \$150 cash with her friend Lesley LOVEDAY to pay for her violin to be 'tuned' (serviced).

Sending postcards, letters and even a birthday gift to her sister, my mum was just starting to relax telling me she was enjoying being a 'tourist', eagerly awaiting her trip on the Orient Express. "next stop Amsterdam" she wrote!

My mum had told us all it was her intention to travel for one year but mentioned to me that should she decide to stay and get a job teaching overseas she would arrange for me to have her belongings, that she stored when packing up her house in a shipping container, shipped over to her.

Chris (LEYDON), my fiancé at the time, now my husband, and I were driving back from Perisher Ski Fields where we had been skiing prior to the Thredbo disaster which occurred on **July 30th, 1997 @11:40pm**. We stopped in Sydney and stayed with my aunt on the way back to break up the trip. On our way home we stopped in at Jean Fox Bridal in Parramatta where I purchased my wedding dress and embarked on our long drive back to the Gold Coast.

When we arrived home (Gold Coast) the light was flashing on our answering machine. My mum had called leaving us a voicemail saying words to the effect 'I've just got word over here about the Thredbo disaster and just wanted to make sure you and Chris were okay'. My mum did call back, which would turn out to be the last time I ever spoke to her. She told me she had postponed her trip on the Orient Express, that she was having a great time 'exploring'. She had left a few jobs for me to do – one being taking a \$50 set of kitchen scales back to TSS where she had taught. In her haste to resign, sell her house (in 3 weeks and at a loss of \$15,000) she grabbed her belongings from school and boxed them up and asked Chris if his grandparents would mind storing a few things in their pool room at their home in Bonogin, which they agreed. It was evident in that call and her letter that these kitchen scales were causing her stress. She wrote in her letter to me (*written on notepaper from Hotel Nikko Narita, Japan) that I must find the scales stored at Nanna and Pa's and take them back to TSS urgently. She couldn't remember if she had bought them with her own money or with petty cash, and as her boss, Luke GLOVER, would be doing a stocktake – she writes "I don't want to give him any ammunition".

Why is this narrative important?

If a woman who just left the country and never intended to return, never wanting to see her family again, as NSW police claimed was the case within 24 hours of them writing up the case in COPS, one might ask why she would be so intently worried about a \$50 set of kitchen scales,

*why she paid her teachers registration in advance for the following year and why she had her violin serviced! **Why?***

The next day after this phone call, my mum's passport flew back into Brisbane International airport from Hong Kong on Cathay Pacific flight CX103 – being a total of only 41 days overseas – far from the year long holiday she had planned. **Why?**

The date on her incoming passenger card is **August 2nd, 1997**.

On April 1st, 2019, I went public with my mum's case launching a podcast with Channel 7 called 'The Lady Vanishes'. To date the podcast has had over 25 million downloads worldwide and garnered huge public and media attention across the globe. Through the podcast a petition was started and received close to 30,000 signatures in support of having my mum added to the National Missing Persons Register for the first time in 22 years. My mum was then put back on the NSW Missing Persons register (first put on in 2007 but was removed in 2011) when the NSW Homicide Team took over carriage of the case from local Tweed / Byron Police in late 2019. I contacted the NSW State Coroner's office at this juncture requesting an inquest be held into the disappearance of my mum.

An inquest then commenced on **Monday 21st June 2021** and concluded on **Thursday 29th February 2024** (findings) – 21 days of hearings in total.

In her findings NSW State Coroner, Teresa O'Sullivan, declared my mum died on or around the **15th of October 1997*** > 3 days before my brother's birthday > 5 days before I had walked into the Byron Bay police station telling the desk sergeant that I was worried, that something was wrong and I had concerns for her welfare. My mum was supposed to be overseas and had missed my brother's birthday (Saturday 18th October) which was very out of character. I had just found out by calling her bank that money had been withdrawn over multiple days from her bank account in Byron Bay (NSW) and Burleigh Heads (QLD) over 3.5 weeks (August – September 1997) ~ last transaction in Byron Bay!

Note: The typical P79B Form was not done – 12 months after I went to Byron Bay Police (October 1997) as per standard operation procedures within the NSW Police Force.

Here is a tiny snippet of what we (the podcast) and the general public have uncovered.

We acquired, through National Archives, my mums incoming and outgoing passenger cards, as my mum's case now falls into the 'open access' period which allowed us access to this information, unredacted.

Her outgoing passenger card stated she was DIVORCED, occupation: HOME DUTIES, leaving permanently to live in LUXEMBOURG. Destination: UK / EUROPE

Her incoming passenger card confirmed she was using the name Florabella Natalia Marion REMAKEL, ticked she was MARRIED, coming back to Australia for 8 days staying at the "Novatel" Hotel (*note incorrect spelling*) in Brisbane, to see 'family and friends'. The box was

ticked that she was a 'visitor' to Australia as opposed to 'resident returning' which did also stand out to us.

*Note: My mum applied for an international driver's licence and in her own hand wrote **Japan / Europe** as her intended destinations. It is also marked she is **MALE**.*

Her passport never left Australia again and expired on the 20th of May 2007 (10 years)

My mum did not mention in her last call to me that she was returning home and this would be the start of the narrative NSW police would run with, with quotes such as "at this stage it is not planned to list the POI as missing" as "it is believed she is capable of behaviour of this nature": "she is a 3 times divorced woman in her 50's and one possible scenario for her behaviour is that she has returned to Australia with a companion and has transferred the funds to England to purchase a property there with the view to move to England" as per what Senior Constable Graham CHILDS wrote in COPS on the 22nd October 1997 @ 14:37pm

I should also note that it states in the COPS event that my mum was seen at 'SYDNEY AIRPORT – TI (terminal?) INTERNATIONAL NSW 2020' **this is incorrect!** My mum's passport clearly indicated she flew into BRISBANE INTERNATIONAL, Queensland.

Additionally, there is an AFP document that states Immigration had my mum coming back into Brisbane airport on the 3rd of September 1997! **This is also incorrect!**

It is important to mention my mum had no place of residence at this time as she had sold her home and had given me her car before she left, so she had no fixed address and no means of independent transport.

introduction of Mr Ric BLUM - more details about him from page 16

As the timeline goes...

On the 31st of July 1997 Richard Lloyd WESTBURY (AKA Ric BLUM) arrived back in Australia on JAL flight JL761 via Japan landing at Brisbane International Airport, QLD

On the 2nd of August 1997 Florabella REMAKEL's passport arrives back on shore – stating on her incoming passenger card she now MARRIED, staying at the NOVATEL HOTEL, BRISBANE for 8 days

Saturday 9th August 1997 – **new evidence** has now been located since the reward increase to 1 Million Dollars on May 4th, 2026. This information firmly places my mum in Yamba by her own hand on this date.

*****11th August 1997** – Mr Ric BLUM purchases a 'rust bucket' from a local car dealer in Northern NSW – paying cash – Mitsubishi Magna Sedan Rego: PVC 096. Police wrote down the dealers' details and a phone number which was in the BOE (Brief of Evidence) but wrote on the note that the phone number was disconnected and no further action was taken. We then found the car dealer through a simple Google search and have since spoken to him and

his wife who clearly remembered this odd transaction. He told us BLUM told him he only needed it for a week as he was *moving permanently to France*. The dealer also remembered there was a woman with "European features and dark hair" waiting in the other car across the road for BLUM while he paid – full details are available.

We have requested this car be located for possible DNA testing – this car was said to be written off in a vehicle accident in Victoria ~ to date the car has not been located.

This car dealer said he was never contacted by NSW Police and he has since passed away.

On the 13th of August 1997 my mums Medicare card was used at OPSM at Grafton Shopping World in GRAFTON – some 315km from Brisbane

On the 15th of August 1997 was the start of daily withdrawals of large sums of money from her bank in Byron Bay (NSW) > Burleigh Heads (QLD) > Byron Bay (NSW) – over approx. 3.5 weeks

***On the 15th of October 1997** it is noted that \$80,000 is telegraphic transferred from my mums account, as is written in the NSW COPS by Graham CHILDS on the 22nd of October 1997 @ 14:37pm

"Enquires with the POI' bank indicated that she has acted on her account a number of times including several, transactions at Byron Bay. The latest transaction was the sum of \$80,000 by telegraphic transfer possibly to an overseas account".

This would become the date the NSW State Coroner Teresa O'Sullivan would suggest being my mums date of death. There is no digital footprint of any evidence my mum is alive after this date.

Note: The 15th of October was also 3 days before my brother, Owen BROWN', birthday. It was so out of character for my mum to miss your birthday and what officially raised the alarm bell for me that something was wrong!

Note: CHILDS did not make any entry in COPS regarding my mums' bank statements, the account details of where or to whom the \$80,000 was transferred to. Her passport never left Australia again and expired in 2007. His narrative in COPS contradicts his 'assumption' that it was for the purpose of purchasing a new home in England.

Mr Ric BLUM opened a bank security envelope the day before this transaction (14th October 1997) with the Commonwealth Bank and closed it 13 days later

For knowledge:

\$80,000.00 cash in 1997 is today (2026) the equivalent to \$161,556.00

A \$165,000.00 house on the Gold Coast in 1997 is today approximately worth \$1.1-1.5 million in 2026.

During our own investigation, Alison SANDY and I called and spoke to the now ex police officer Graham CHILDS for a chat which was recorded. You can hear this conversation in Episode 12 'Leydon v NSW Police' of The Lady Vanishes.

In this call I asked Graham:

SL *"so what would be normal behaviour, or normal practice, if you have rung me and tell me that you have located her, would you have written that on the file"?*

GC *"ah, um, yeah I would like to think I would have, it's not to say that I didn't, but I don't remember it, I can't imagine and I'm sorry this is all summation, because Sally I can't imagine what you are going through, um but, I would imagine I would be the only one that would do that, to be honest, and you are right, I am a good guy, I'm a decorated policeman, you know, so I took my job very seriously, but if I did do that, it sounds like I fell down on my job, by not recording that. It sounds like I, you know, I skipped a step there, you know, so if I did ring, it's pretty lousy of me, not to have recorded that and go back in and update the system and say that I made that phone call, so I fallen down there, I feel pretty bad about that".*

There is a conflict for Chris and I, in regard to the police notebook written by CHILDS, regarding our recollection what day we attended the Byron Bay Police station. Chris and I are firm we drove down the day after I called the bank, which was Sunday 19th October 1997 when our friend Renee SKUSE was over for dinner while her husband was playing in his band – which he did often on Sundays. It is our recollection we left our home in the morning on Monday 20th October 1997, driving to Byron Bay from the Gold Coast which took approx. 2.5 hours in 1997. We walked the streets and went to the bank before going to the Byron Bay police station which we recall was around lunchtime. CHILDS has written notes in his notebook of making phone calls to my mum's banks and immigration in Brisbane as follows:

The COPS entry starts at 14:30pm on the 22.10.1997 (Wednesday) CHILDS made enquires with John LEWIS, Federal Police Brisbane as to immigration details (as set out in his narrative). Also, inquiries with State Bank Byron Bay as to transactions and has noted the bank managers name at Ashmore branch on the Gold Coast. CHILDS also notes "person reporting advised to contact if change in general circumstances" (quote)

@14:47pm Graham CHILDS allocates himself as the OIC on the case

@14:52pm WARNING MESSAGE added to the COPS event

"VICTIM HAS RETURNED TO COUNTRY AND NOT CONTACTED FAMILY UPON RETURN. THERE ARE FEARS FOR HER WELFARE AS \$80,000 HAS BEEN TRANSFERRED FROM HER ACCOUNT FOR NO APPARENT REASON"

I want to add here, that throughout the inquest the NSW Police Commissioner's Barrister Kim BOURKE, suggested that it was because I didn't use the word 'missing', when we went to Byron Bay police station as to why they marked her as an 'occurrence only'. The above warning message made by CHILDS himself clearly recollects my words that I held fears for her safety. I

was heavily criticized and blamed for not walking into the police station and saying the words 'my mum is a missing person'. BOURKE repeatedly lay blame on me for NSW Police' inaction, the daughter of a missing woman. The coroner reminded BOURKE more than once to pull her tone back saying it wasn't helpful.

The court made an 'inference' based on CHILDS notebook as to the day Chris and I attended Byron Bay police.

@4:13AM Thursday 23rd October 1997 – Senior Constable Michael PEARCE marks the clear up status as "NO FURTHER INVESTIGATION – NO FURTHER ACTION UNTIL THE PERSON IS REPORTED MISSING". "WORK PRIORITY" is stated as the reason - less than 24 hours from when CHILDS wrote it up in COPS.

Regardless of the fact there was a WARNING MESSAGE added to COPS, my mum was not regarded by Byron Bay police as missing 'in the true sense of the word' and her one-page file was marked an 'occurrence only' with no further action required and was shelved. Unbeknown to me, my mum was not listed as missing by NSW police at this time.

In **January 2007** I contacted the AFP Missing Persons unit as my mum's ten-year anniversary was fast approaching. I was in my second trimester of my third pregnancy. Rebecca KOTZ answered my call and took time to talk to me on what was a lengthy conversation. I felt heard and supported for the first time in ten years. Shortly after, Rebecca flew to Brisbane to meet me in person and asked me to be the face of Missing Persons Week – August 2007 (MPW). She believed it would be a great way to bring some media exposure to my mums' disappearance.

I worked on preparing for this huge task pulling myself back through the decade of trauma whilst preparing for my baby who was due to be born late June 2007 via C-Section. Storing breast milk and making arrangements to support my young family for what I was told would be an extremely busy and stressful week travelling to Melbourne, Sydney and the ACT to present to media about my mum's case. I was also still working full time.

In the brief of evidence (BOE) there is a letter dated Friday 20th July 2007 from the AFP regarding: '*withdrawal of Marion's story for MP week 2007*' which confirms the points below:

A week before the launch I received a call from Rebecca explaining to me that sadly NSW police had told the AFP that I was not allowed to be the face of MPW due to the fact that year was about missing people with mental health and as my mum had not been diagnosed with mental health I was being "pulled".

Through the inquest process I was finally able to read 'some' of the heavily redacted police files. It is apparent based on a few entries in COPS whereby it is recorded that Rebecca KOTZ called NSW MPU and asked for my mum's file.

My mum's status was at this juncture changed from 'Occurrence Only' to 'Missing'.

It was discussed at the inquest that this transition was likely due to the fact that NSW police DID NOT have my mum listed as missing at that time, in actual fact that she had never been listed as missing by NSW Police, ever.

COPS events as noted in the BOE relating to this.

6th June 2007

Joanne WILLIAMS – complete – sec MISSING PERSONS * CONTACTED RE CASE * GENERAL

@13:47pm Joanne WILLIAMS > notes that Rebecca KOTZ – AFP MPU contacted re: case general

@13:47pm COMPLETE

10th July 2007 @15:42pm Steven MCALISTER – sec MISSING PERSON * COMPLETE

INPS CAREY – CONTACTED RE STATUS OF THIS CASE

SENT REQUEST TO QLD POLICE TO CHECK DATABASE RTA

Essentially it notes that my mum's case was changed from an 'Occurrence Only' to 'Missing' at this point. In my opinion, a coverup of the fact my concerns for my mum's safety and wellbeing were ignored in October 1997 when I walked into Byron Bay police station. The initial narrative written on her file in COPS by CHILDS continued to flow through to anyone who touched my mum's case for over a decade. That "it is believed she is capable of behaviour of this nature": "she is a 3 times divorced woman in her 50's!"

It was suggested by Council Assisting the Coroner that this change clearly noted in COPS was done to, words to that effect, 'save face' of the NSW Missing Persons unit.

The officer in charge of my mum's case in 2007 was Senior Constable Steven McALISTER who was positioned at the Missing Persons Unit in Sydney.

2020 Inquest - When asked if he had any recollection of my mum's case, he told the coroner that he remembered my mum's case because my mum was married to Johnny Warren, Australia's most famous soccer player, and he loved soccer!

McALISTER called me around this same time in mid-2007, I was visiting my grandparents' home on the Sunshine Coast when he called. He was asking me questions like what my mum looked like, her date of birth etc. I expressed stress in hearing this explaining I told the desk sergeant all these details 10 years ago so why he was needing to ask me these questions. I was unaware still at this point my mum was not on the missing person register. He gave me the impression that he could not find my mums file.

To add: the MPU ran multiple checks for general 'proof of life' but in many instances her name, spelling and other details like date of birth were wrong. There is one search where

they are asking for information about a 'Warren Brown' (two of her previous surnames). There are so many errors, I made a 'bundle' of all the documents that contain the errors for my legal team to reference at the inquest.

On 27th July 2*** an email from INSPECTOR ***** wrote to the AFP stating he believed my mum "was spoken to as recently as last month" also adding "seems Sally is seeking a scapegoat" for this situation. INSPECTOR ***** name was **supressed** by request of the NSW Police commissioners Barrister during the inquest; hence I have left it out of this submission!

*If the unit commander of the [REDACTED] is writing to other agencies that my mum was spoken to and I was looking for a scapegoat in my search for her, what chance did I have! If the [REDACTED] is using this type of speculation, language, what hope do families have! Those working below these 'leaders', who are supposed to be helping them to find their missing loved one, doing so without speculation when that is exactly what their superior is projecting! It's no wonder the assumptions just kept rolling through the entire case file with comments like these! I will note that every police officer in QLD and NSW who touched my mum's case, who were called to give evidence at the inquest, were asked had they ever spoken to or sighted my mum and **every single one of them said NO**. Never sighted, never spoken to my mum yet there are multiple dribbles throughout my mum's case where police claim they had and comments like 'there is no concerns held for her safety' continued.*

On the 1st of December 2009 a new detective was made the OIC for my mum's case and he called me to introduce himself - Detective Senior Constable Gary SHEEHAN.

On the 22nd of January 2010 13 years after my mum had disappeared, I was asked to drive down to Byron Bay police to give them a DNA sample. I found out 10 years later (2020) when I was asked by the AFP to go to Canberra and be the face of their new DNA program headed up by Dr Jodie WARD, that the test they did in 2010 was a 'voluntary sample' only and those samples cannot be upload to the national DNA database! For 20 years my DNA was not on the national or NSW DNA database for missing persons.

On my birthday, 12th May 2010 SHEEHAN called me to ask me to provide NSW Police with a statement. This was the **first time** I had been asked to provide a statement to NSW Police – **13 years after my mum's disappearance.**

On the 27th of May 2010 I drove to Tweed Heads police station with my friend Judy REID as my support person. SHEEHAN typed up my statement while I spoke. It was a completely exhausting experience him asking me to pull myself all the way back to when I was born, our family history, my mums' marriages which included details before I was even born, where we lived – dates and addresses, before recalling my memory of what happened 13 years earlier in 1997 and all that I had done since. No rest, no breaks. I vaguely recall he did ask me if I'd like to read over the statement when we were done, but we had been there for many hours,

and I needed to drop my friend back home before driving back to Brisbane to my 3 children (all under 10). I signed what he had typed not reading it.

That was foolish on my behalf being there were, in my opinion, errors typed and word choices I believe I did not make. The NSW Police Commissioner's Barrister, BOURKE and Council Assisting the Coroner at the inquest, focused multiple times on these errors and the fact I told the court I signed it without re reading it! No consideration given as to the trauma of reliving what I have had to go through with my mum's disappearance and my brothers' suicide and being asked 13 years after the fact my mum went missing – for the first time to recollect my entire life.

On the 29th of June 2010 SHEEHAN contacted me about any knowledge of people known to me in the GRAFTON area (Northern NSW)

In **August 2010** SHEEHAN alerted me that he had found a note on my mums file about a Crimestoppers report # 134180864 that had been called in on the **13th May 2008** which said, 'a female by the name Marion who had gone missing from the Tweed area in 1994 was buried along the Niagara street bike track left of the bridge'. Armidale Detective Sean ROBINSON of the Criminal Investigation Unit wrote this notation.

On June 23rd, 2008, a few inquiries were made to the home of the male mentioned in the Crimestoppers report. He said he knew nothing and couldn't make outgoing calls on his home phone 'so how could he have called Crimestoppers' was the gist of the police response. There was no follow up at this time. That man has since died.

On the 3rd of August 2010 SHEEHAN told me he asked his commander if he could get permission to go and take a look in Armidale. The communication around this varied where in a police media approved interview for Ch7 SHEEHAN stated he "took out a cadaver dog and involved the SES in a fairly expansive search for two days". It is stated in SHEEHAN's statement that they only did 1 day searching starting at 7:30am – concluding by 11:10am (less than 4 hours) using a cadaver dog named Jeff!

*In **August 2024** – Search Dogs Sydney met myself, my husband Chris and Joni Condos in Armidale where we did a full day's search of the said areas. No evidence of my mum was located by us at this location at Armidale, Northern NSW using cadaver dogs.*

On the 18th of July 2010 SHEEHAN travelled to Queensland and visited Lesley LOVEDAY to get her statement. Lesley was the last *known* person to see my mum alive, dropping her to the bus stop in Southport with all her luggage. This same trip to the Gold Coast he contacted my mums last known partner, Greg EDWARDS, to see if he could get a statement but Greg was not available. Greg told the podcast that SHEEHAN said he'd arrange another time, but to date he'd never heard back.

On the 5th of August 2010 Tweed Byron local area command noted my mum 'Marion' was a missing person "last seen in Byron Bay" as noted in the *Tweed Daily News*.

On September 29th, 2010, Journalist, Susan CHENERY contacted SHEEHAN regarding her writing an article for the *Australian Women's Weekly* "Missing Mums" – and was to feature my mum, Lynette DAWSON and Bronwyn WINFIELD. NSW Police declined an interview. Susan told me she was handed a piece of paper by a police officer in NSWMPU with my mum's name on it telling her to *take a look* at this case. That is how she found out my mum was missing and reached out to me to offer to help share my story.

13th of August 1997, 13 years since my mum disappeared, SHEEHAN did a search and noted that my mum's Medicare card had been used in Grafton, Northern NSW. This important detail is also noted to be incorrectly mentioned in his statement with him writing the 13th of September instead of the 13th of August 1997 which is the correct date. He wrote that she had gone to see a doctor and spent his time trying to locate who he wrote to be Dr Dean EVANS who it was assumed operated out of a surgery in Grafton Shopping World.

Another 9 years pass, after the homicide team took over my mum's case in late 2019, it was discovered that Mr Dean EVANS was in fact an Optometrist, not a doctor! Dean EVANS was called and gave evidence at my mum's inquest. He told the court that *all new patients had to fill in a new patient card and this would have included an address and phone number for her*.

Devastatingly, as SHEEHAN assumed this entry with Medicare was a doctor and not an Optometrist from OPSM, **the new patient card that would have been available was now destroyed**. There was no reference on the documents to Dean EVANS being a doctor – this was seemingly an assumption made by the detective and important time was wasted looking for the wrong person. The information on that card could have been instrumental in locating my mum, if she was in fact still alive in 2010.

Another lost opportunity.

Throughout the evidence there are also multiple requests for information regarding my mum's case by the NSW coroner's court requesting a P79B Form. Also requests from the NSWMPU, letting SHEEHAN know they had remains they wanted to check against my mum, the documents note *'still no response'*.

A P79B form is supposed to be completed for the coroner when a missing person has not been located, and the missing person has not contacted their NOK after 12 months missing, assumed deceased. As NSW Police believed (assumed) my mum deliberately disappeared herself, this form was not done until the case was moved to the NSW Unsolved Homicide Team at the end of 2019.

5th May 2011 SHEEHAN notifies BORTON of discovery of passport in the name REMAKEL. Noted: Deed Poll but not sure what state, not NSW. *"Possibly still alive"* is written. Requested checks done in new name with government agencies.

May 5th, 2011, SHEEHAN called Chris LEYDON telling him he had new information that he wanted to tell me (Sally) in person. Chris told him it was Mother's Day on Sunday 8th of May

and my birthday that Thursday (12th). Chris asked that he come the following week as it's typically a stressful week for me.

On Sunday 15th May 2011 SHEEHAN drove to our home in Norman Park, Brisbane and sat at our back table on our deck. It is our recollection; he put a piece of A4 paper on the table facing us and asked if he could use the bathroom. I said of course and pointed to its location inside our home. He then stood up and said, 'if you were to look here, you might find something of interest' and pointed to the top of the page before walking to the bathroom. At a quick glance we saw at the top of the page a list of all my mums' names. It started with Marion WILSON, Marion WARREN, Marion BROWN, Marion BARTER, then Florabella Natalia Marion REMAKEL with non-alphanumeric characters in between each name. There was an image of my mum's passport photo – front and back, a section that showed she was coming back to Australia for 8 days and I saw the word LUXEMBOURG. It looked like things had been cut out and placed on to fit one A4 piece of paper and photocopied.

This was the first time I was made aware of my mum changing her name and that is what I told the inquest as to how I learnt of the name change, as did my husband Chris.

It took NSW police 14 years to find out my mum had legally changed her name by deed poll (in QLD) and used a new passport with that name on it to leave and return to Australia in 1997!

At the inquest SHEEHAN was given an opportunity to rebut both Chris and my evidence regarding this event. He denied that he showed us a piece of paper in our home, despite him writing about having new information about a name change and wanting to tell me in person about it in COPS. He said it didn't happen and that piece of paper has never been seen again, and that was that!

We have since done a 'google trend search' on the name RAMEKEL which is how I was spelling it on my Facebook page in 2013 (phonetically). This search shows that someone in Brisbane between the 15th-21ST May 2011 searched the name RAMEKEL – so many times it had a 100% hit rate. Other than my mum and one other person who I have briefly mentioned in this submission who resides in NSW – there are NO RAMEKEL or REMAKEL (correct spelling) living in Australia. SHEEHAN also lives in Northern NSW.

My eldest daughter firmly remembers googling the name as soon as we learnt of the name change to see what we could find. She also recalls SHEEHAN coming to our home and sitting on our back deck – it was a Sunday.

On the 22nd of September 2011 SHEEHAN wrote two reports –

1. Removing my mum from the NSW Missing Person Register; and
2. Not pursuing reporting to the NSW Coroner or QLD Coroner with a response given to Operation FIRENZE "closed as not considered a genuine missing person"

Monday 17th October 2011 an email between Sergeant Julie DEAN NSWMPU and SHEEHAN confirming Chief Inspector P. ROUSSOS (who was the manager of the MPU) had agreed to remove my mum from the Missing Person database and mark as an 'occurrence only' yet again! Quoting "family had accepted that she had estranged herself from them".

My mum was removed from the NSW Missing Person Register.

Quote: Having read the attached file, I am of the opinion that:

1. An intensive investigation by Police indicates the MP Barter has by choice changed her name and "left" her family,
2. The family have apparently accepted that the MP has voluntarily estranged herself from them, and
3. There are no fears held for the safety of the MP.

Based on these points, I approve the removal of the MP status from this file and that it should be recorded as an Occurrence only. The family should be advised of the family reunion options should they decide to make further enquiries.

P. Roussos

C/Insp, 17/10/11

Serg Julie DEAN signing off with *"Hope this helps, and I will organise for this to be removed today from our MPU Database. Thanks for your thorough investigation"*.

Note: it was discussed at the inquest that a missing person cannot be removed from the MPR (register) by the Missing Person unit, it must be a directive of the local command to which the carriage of the case sits.

This is a breach of policy that the coroner did refer to in her findings but has not been dealt with, to my satisfaction.

On the 8th of November 2011 SHEEHAN formally suspends the case (COPS admin action)

Wednesday 7th December 2011 SHEEHAN writes 'Sally Leydon informed of the decision by the NSW Missing Persons Unit to suspend the case'.

I firmly dispute this – I was not informed, I was not made aware about any action taken since DET SEN CON SHEEHAN who came to my home on May 15th, 2011, and showed my husband and I a single piece of paper with a name change on it regarding my mum.

Note: NSW COPS event shows NO NEW ENTRIES from NOV 2011 – JAN 2012 and nothing noted regarding calling or notifying me of any changes to my mum's case file despite SHEEHAN mentioning in point 111. of his statement to the coroner that he did and "I made a notation of this call in the case management narratives".

2nd February 2013 I created the Facebook page – Missing Person Marion Barter

14th February 2013 I was interviewed for a newspaper – Armidale Express tilted 'Searching for clues to find missing mum'

On the 17th of March 2013 I contacted LUXEMBOURG Police asking for their help. They responded saying they can only act on requests from Australian Law Enforcement.

I must also add, how would I have known about any connection to Luxembourg, so much so I contacted their police, if I had not seen it as mentioned on the piece of paper I have previously referred to?

On the 25th of November 2016 I attended my local police station (Morningside, QLD) to request they re-open or transfer my mum's case from NSW Police after SHEEHAN told me his hands are tied and they have closed the case. SHEEHAN was the one who suggested to me that I go to QLD police as he will be pushing for the case to be moved to QLD telling me the NSW Coroner won't take it on as my mum was living in QLD when she disappeared, not NSW. He told me over the phone 'it's not like I'm just to going to dump you over the border in a wheelbarrow, I'm in this up to my neck'.

I was later called by QLD Police who told me they can't just take on carriage of the case simply because I am dissatisfied with another jurisdiction. **No further action.**

December 6th, 2016, I wrote an email to SHEEHAN with a list of 8 ideas I had to check if these things had been done in the search for answers. These included:

1. Check my mum's superannuation ~ had it been withdrawn now she would be of age
2. Check passenger lists of the flights she took ~ if the same name appeared on both outgoing and incoming ~ that person could be a POI
3. Check with the Orient Express ~ did my mum ever go on it
4. New passport checks to see if she got a new one or not since the last one expired in 2007
5. Request he contact Luxembourg police

Again, how would I have known about the Luxembourg connection if I didn't see the piece of paper where I noted Luxembourg was written!

On the 15th of December 2016 I followed up with a chaser email as he had still not replied

Tuesday December 20th, 2016, SHEEHAN replied with

Hi Sally,

I did receive your emails, and I have copies of them on my desk.

As I explained to you on the phone, this is something I will be doing 'unofficially' for you, and because of that I will not be able to give the inquires any priority over any 'official' jobs that I am doing. It may take some time.

It may also mean that I just cannot get access to some of the things about which you have asked. Having said that, I will do my best.

Please do not get too excited about things, it may well be that we don't get any more answers than we already have.

Regards,

Gary

2017, it is now 20 years since my mum disappeared.

17th February 2017 after a phone call to the Australian Tax Office, I formally wrote to them to inform them of the current situation and asked if they could advise if my mum had done a Tax Return in 1997. Knowing her passport had come back into the country on the **2nd of August 1997** and all the money withdrawals on her account, if it was my mum, this activity would suggest money was of importance. So, if she had tax money owing to her, she may have done a tax return.

I was told I needed to have my mum to contact them to update her account adding me as an 'authority' to be able to act on her account.

There was absolutely zero compassion or understanding from the ATO staffer who seemingly could not grasp the concept that my mum is missing. That I could not get her to contact them nor update her account. It would take me needing to go through a coronial inquest, that I was told had cost over 1 million dollars, apply for a death certificate, more costs, and then apply for a Grant of Probate, that typically costs around \$5000, to be able to speak with them and ask this simple question about my missing mum. A perfect example of why Absentia Law should be a valued consideration.

18th December 2017 I applied to GIPA (Government Information Public Access) for information through FOI asking for my mums NSW Police file, as a last resort.

February 1st 2018 I received a response from the Ministerial and Parliamentary Services Department of Justice following up from two separate emails I had sent to both Gladys BEREJKLIAN MP, who was NSW Premier at the time, and Minister Troy GRANT MP asking for carriage of my mum's case to be transferred from NSW to QLD.

Here are some inserts from this email I would like to share demonstrating a true lack of care and compassion about my situation of having a missing mum and another example of why words matter – as they too were running with the narrative on her police file that there is no reason to hold concerns for her safety and wellbeing. A very dangerous assumption and one that has had catastrophic consequences.

Quote:

As you have also raised this matter directly with Minister GRANT, I trust you will accept this reply in response to both letters.

I appreciate the distress the disappearance of your mother has caused you and your family members.

The NSWPF advise that substantial inquiries, both local and national, were conducted into the whereabouts of your mother. Despite these inquiries, no information could be obtained as to her whereabouts.

In the absence of any new information since October 2011, and as there is no evidence to hold concerns for her safely, your mothers missing person status has been removed. Whilst I appreciate this is distressing for you; these are operational policy matters for the NSWPF.

The unnamed person who signed off on this email then provided me the phone number for the Tweed Byron Police District should I wish to call and discuss the matter with them. The same district police who were openly telling me they were pushing the case to QLDPF. Also mentioning that I may wish to contact 'Family and Friends of Missing Persons Unit' (FFMPU) as they provide counselling!

I cannot stress enough that YOUR WORDS MATTER and they should be voiced with empathy, compassion and concern when dealing with families of the missing!

31st October 2018 I met with Alison SANDY from Ch7 for the first time to discuss my mum's story and discussions were underway regarding the podcast being launched – April 1, 2019.

Alison being the FOI Editor for the Seven Network at this time, encouraged me to call Freedom of Information to chase up how my request was going. I explained the situation and this lady listened. She said my request was sitting at the bottom of the pile still after 12 months but heard me and told me she would move it to the top! Within a week I received 'something'.

After finally getting a **heavily redacted FOI file** for my mum, I saw the half page entry made by CHILDS on October 22nd, 1997, for the very first time.

Mid December 2018 I called SHEEHAN to ask for an update on mums' case. He told me at this point 'this is probably as good as its going to get'. It was at this moment I informed him of my media interest with Ch7. I told him I was going to New Zealand with my family for Christmas / New Years and I wouldn't be back till mid-January.

16th January 2019 SHEEHAN called me at 2:50pm and we spoke for 50 minutes. In this call he told me that he had done 15 requests that day to every state in Australia requesting proof of life checks be done. He checked mum's passport - AUS > O/S and if there were any new name changes. Telling me "everything supports she is in Australia" > Medicare card used 3 weeks after she arrived back, in Grafton. He told me he asked his boss to give the case to

another detective for 'a fresh set of eyes' to look over it again to see if anything was missed. He said, *"I doubt they'll find anything as I was very thorough!"* I made notes of this call in my notebook and have written that he told me he was very upset with Graham CHILDS as he knew him well and his statement *"looks like he wrote it up later making some errors and assumptions, which is disappointing"*.

7th February 2019 SHEEHAN called me again to update me on the previous call. He told me only NSW and ACT had come back so far - with zero results. He made the comment that he has satisfied all accounts of the police check list of 'facts'. I proceeded to ask him about '**the why**'.

Why did my mum change her name? Why did she come back to Australia only 6 weeks after she left for her 12-month holiday – her telling us she took way too much luggage, so much so she had to put it in the luggage hold at Heathrow Airport (she wrote in a postcard)? Why were all her digital footprints in Northern NSW? Why did she take out large sums of money every day for 3.5 weeks instead of withdrawing a lump sum?

Why would she send \$80,000 by telegraphic transfer overseas when her passport never leaves Australia again? He said, **"we're not interested in the 'why'!"**

Interestingly, this same day it is recorded in COPS that SHEEHAN reopened the case changing it from 'suspended to open'.

I want to preface here that all the information from police usually was via a phone call, never in writing. So, I took to taking notes of every call, so I didn't forget and by way of a record of events which have otherwise been scant throughout my mum's case. Having these conversations put in writing would be so much more beneficial, not just for the police and any following procedures, but also for families dealing with this trauma so it is all correctly documented. The police cannot then refute the information, as has been my experience, and is something I would like to see change within NSWPF.

On the 27th of July 2019 SHEEHAN called me, I was in hospital with my eldest daughter who was quite unwell at this time. He didn't ask if it was a good time to chat but started telling me that the coroner was now looking into my mum's case and that her case will be moved to the NSW homicide squad. That he will no longer be the OIC on my mum's case.

1st September 2020 my husband Chris was asked to provide his first statement - 8475 days after my mum went missing. A vital person who had experienced firsthand accounts of many events leading up to and after my mum disappeared, yet he had never been asked to provide a statement till 2020. Then expected to remember every single detail, right down to the date we booked our ski holiday in 1997 to go skiing at Perisher – BEFORE my mum was missing ~ some 23 years later!

Monday 28th November 2022, 4 weeks before Christmas we flew our family (6) to Sydney to prepare for the coroner's findings scheduled for 10am on Wednesday 30th November 2022. Less than 2 hours after we arrived in Sydney, I received a call from my lawyer telling me the coroner had 'vacated'. I asked what vacated means – he told me they had cancelled with no new date advised. My husband immediately called Detective Inspector Nigel WARREN and asked what was going on telling him we had just flown down. He told us that they had a meeting 'last Thursday' and it was decided then that more investigation needs to be done – "didn't anyone tell you?", he exclaimed!

I can't begin to tell you the impact this had, not just on me but my children and Chris. We had been preparing for the coroner to tell us my mum was deceased officially for the first time in 25 years; I had a complete break down at this point. Stressed also by the fact my children had to endure this as well, their grandmother whom they have never met yet has had such a huge impact on their young lives, bumped again. And the cost! We paid around \$6000 for airfares, accommodation, car hire to attend and no one thought to inform my lawyers they had vacated before my family flew to Sydney and with absolutely zero empathy or an apology!

On February 29th, 2024, 2 years, 8 months later, my husband and I attended the Coroners Court in Lidcombe, Sydney to hear the coroners' findings. This was the first time I heard someone officially tell me my mum is deceased.

Before walking into court, the OIC, Detective Inspector Nigel WARREN (Unsolved 'inactive' Homicide) on my mum's case told me when I asked him where we are at, "**your mum's case is open but inactive**". I asked him to clarify exactly what this means in layman's terms and he told me straight up "**we have 800 cases Sally; we need to prioritize**".

After everything we have found and brought to the table, I felt my mum was STILL not a priority within the NSWPF nor the Australian Government (AFP, Home Affairs, Immigration)

And after all that... We 'the public' found a man! Mr Ric BLUM who till recently was living in East Ballina, Northern NSW with his wife of 40 + years, Diane de Hedervary (Nee WALKER).

A Belgium National who was granted Australian Citizenship on the **24th of March 1976** under the name Frederick de Hedervary. He and his wife have been on full Centrelink benefits since the 1980's. Him a full disability pension, Diane as his fulltime carer.

On the 9th of December 1971 Willy WOUTERS was detained and sentence at Rouen, France to 4 years imprisonment for charges of fraud, forgery, confidence tricks and giving false identity.

21st May 1974 Willy WOUTERS is discharged from prison in Rouen, France

12 days later...

2nd June 1974 Fredy DAVID arrives in Australia on flight QF730 from DENPASAR

Fredy DAVID being Willy WOUTERS who is also Frederick de HEDERVARY, now Ric BLUM

The real Fredy DAVID is his brother! He was using his identity.

12th February 1976 Willy WOUTERS changed his name via deed poll to Frederick David de Hedervary in Australia.

It is noted by immigration that he arrived in Australia **undetected** between his release from prison in 1974 and 1976.

He allegedly lied on his **application for citizenship** not indicating he had previously been in prison.

We have copies of documentation from National Archives stating Immigration noted that this same man should be charged under section 50 of the Citizenship Act, but he was marked as 'offshore' at the time and it was then filed, then they lost the file.

Fact: if immigration had acted on what they wrote on this file, this man would likely have been deported in the 70's and would never have had the chance to meet my mum or the other women who allege to have been defrauded and emotionally abused by him! To that, my mum and my brother would most likely still be alive and well today. The continued inaction by Immigration and Home Affairs to act on this matter is nothing short of deplorable.

****Professor Kim RUBENSTEIN**, a leading expert in Australian citizenship law, was interviewed by Alison SANDY on The Lady Vanishes discussing the Statute of Limitations regarding falsely answering to questions on an application for Australian citizenship******

Ric BLUM was called to give evidence at my mum's inquest and was on the stand for a total of 9 days!

A man who allegedly has used over 53 aliases' worldwide

A man who Australia has granted 10 passports under different identities

BLUM admitted to having an affair with my mum in 1997, around the time of her selling her home, and is firmly on her timeline at the time of her disappearance.

He also admitted to having a Queensland Drivers licence in the name Fernand REMAKEL – a stolen identity from a man in Luxembourg he knows because he also had an alleged affair with his ex-wife, Monique CORNELIUS.

I would like to add here that Mr BLUM was given the entire Brief of Evidence (BOE) to read PRIOR to giving evidence at the inquest into my mum's disappearance! This is baffling to me and those working with me!

Wednesday 17th June 1997 BLUM flew out of Brisbane International under another different passport name – Richard Lloyd WESTBURY (5 days before my mum's flight). He admits to staying at Hotel Nikko Narita, Japan. *The same hotel as the notepaper and envelope my mum used to write to me after she left Australia, I mentioned earlier.

31st July 1997 BLUM arrived back in Brisbane Airport as Richard Lloyd WESTBURY (2 days before my mum returned).

We witnessed 3 other women give evidence at my mum's inquest, and another 2 spoke openly of disturbing details about BLUM to Ch7's Spotlight program. One other told her story to the Luxembourg Wort Newspaper but asked her identity to be protected, another was too afraid and did not speak but her statement to NSW police in 1998 was used in evidence. Seven brave women from around the globe, one being his estranged daughter of his third wife, bravely spoke of similar experiences and worrying details of their involvement with this man.

At no time was the notion of coercive control, gaslighting, manipulation nor the mental, financial and emotional abuse these women articulated through their witness testimony and or statements, considered. Sadly two of these brave woman have since passed away, two are said to be in care with dementia!

When I questioned the lack of action regarding BLUM, I was told the inquest was about two things:

1. Is my mum dead or alive
2. Did NSW police do their job correctly

Ric BLUM was not on trial!

NSW State Coroner, Teresa O'Sullivan ruled in her findings:

447. Counsel Assisting submitted that taking into consideration the entirety of the evidence and Mr Blum's confounding representations in the witness box, there is a sufficient basis for a further and significant finding in regard to Mr Blum:

- a) That he has further knowledge about the circumstances of Marion's travel overseas
- b) That he has further knowledge of his relationship with her in the months prior to her disappearance
- c) That he has further knowledge of her circumstances following her return from overseas; and
- d) that he has further knowledge of the withdrawals and transfer of her money

Moreover, Counsel Assisting submitted that there is a sufficient basis for a finding that he was and is deliberately unwilling to divulge the further knowledge to the court. The coroner agreeing with her team.

Adding:

e) That there is a sufficient basis for a finding that he was and is deliberately unwilling to divulge this further knowledge to the court.

I feel it important to mention here – I have been pushing for my mum’s reward to be increased to 1 million dollars since the findings concluded on February 29th, 2024. Someone somewhere knows something! I had a petition going and in October last year (2025), Detective Inspector Nigel WARREN told me he would support my push for a reward increase, which he did. The announcement was made at a press conference at State Crime Command, Parramatta on Monday May 4th, 2026, and I flew down from Brisbane at my own expense to be there. Detective Superintendent Joe Doueihi was asked some pressing questions regarding Ric BLUM, and when asked had NSW Police gone back to reinterview Ric BLUM since the findings were handed down, he told the press he believed Mr BLUM has expressed his 'right to silence'!

As for the Coroners response to the NSW Police Force her findings state:

511. Having considered all the evidence tendered and the submissions made, I find that the nature and adequacy of the police investigation into the disappearance of Marion by NSW Police between 1997 and 2019 was not adequate and agree with Council Assisting that it is clear from the evidence that following the initial report made by Sally to Byron Bay Police Station on 22 October 1997, that little was done to investigate Marion’s whereabouts until approximately ten years later in 2007.

512. I also find that the police investigation into the disappearance of Marion by NSW Police from the report on 22 October 1997 up until 2007 was not conducted in an appropriate and timely manner and not consistent with the relevant policy in force within NSW Police at the time.

561. I accept the submissions made by the family and make the findings proposed that Detective Senior Constable Sheehan’s decision to recommend that Marion Barter be removed from the Missing Person’s Register in 22 September 2011, and that the approval by the Manager of the Missing Person’s Unit of that removal, were incorrect and should not have occurred; that Marion should not have been classified as located in 2011 and that this was not consistent with the 2007 Missing Persons Policies and Procedures document which was applicable at the time; and that the re-classification of Marion to located in 2011 meant that **no further investigation was undertaken into Marion’s disappearance for another five years**, which had a further serious impact on the availability of evidence.

She concluded:

To the New South Wales Commissioner of Police

I recommend that the NSW Commissioner of Police cause the investigation into the death of missing person Florabella Natalia Marion REMAKEL, formally known as Marion BARTER, to be referred to or remain within the State Crime Command Unsolved Homicide Team for ongoing investigation, review and monitoring.

FACT: Mr Ric BLUM lied multiple times in his evidence; the coroner was firm she believes he knows more than he was willing to tell the court and recommended the case back to the NSW Homicide Squad for "ongoing investigation". We were then made aware by 'google alert' of a letter that the NSW Police Commissioner sent to the Attorney General's office, noting the words "ongoing investigation" had been removed.

NSW UHT told me in a phone call on **Tuesday 18th February 2025**, to words of the effect, that they were looking into Ric BLUM regarding him lying under oath. At the time of submitting this submission, I am unaware of any movement regarding further action.

Ric BLUM will be turning 87 this July! After 29 years there is STILL NO SENSE OF URGENCY to help resolve what has happened to my missing mum.

At the conclusion of the inquest, my legal team told me this is probably as good as it gets and that I should use the media to make some noise! My Barrister telling me words to the effect, "he is too old, that the DPP would not get involved as with how slow the legal wheels turn, he would likely never make it to trial"!

To date – even with the other women who have come forward, it has never been considered by authorities that every fact we have presented puts my mum in an extremely vulnerable and dangerous position:

- *She didn't tell anyone about her new secret partner.*
- *She changed her name to the same name he admitted to using with identical initials, FNMR.*
- *She sold her home in 3 weeks and at a loss, therefore having nowhere to live and no independent transport.*
- *She didn't tell us she was coming back to Australia and finds herself literally bouncing from place to place in Byron Bay > Grafton > Yamba, where Ric BLUM lived within close proximity with his wife and children at the time.*

All her money then is withdrawn except for a small portion we believe she was using for her holiday which remained untouched and went into unclaimed monies till December 2024.

Everything gone! All gone, the shipping container that stored all her belongings has never been located, all her precious jewellery, all her money and most importantly my mum!

We are talking about a convicted conman, with women who had similar dealings with him who said they were afraid to talk, to give evidence at the inquest, asked to keep their identities protected, saying that he is dangerous, talking about conversations with him about poisons and his odd fascination with this, "he could kill" says Monique Cornelius to Ch7' Spotlight program.

The narrative that my mum chose to leave her children and her family in my opinion was the easiest outcome for police. Queensland MPU, Paula MCKENZIE, told the coroner that "we like to clean them up quick" in her evidence referring to quick turnaround times to close cases. They looked at my mum's case for 8 days when my grandfather said he wasn't satisfied with what NSW police told me. They told him there is nothing more the police can do and suggested he find a private investigator and start in Byron Bay!

My mum is still missing!

My brother took his own life at the age of 27 believing the police had spoken to our mum, them telling us she didn't want anyone to know where she is or what she was doing. That "you can tell them to stop looking for me in Byron Bay as I am far, far away".

Her parents and her three sisters believed what the police had told our family, my grandmother going as far as removing my mum from her Will, trusting that if the police said this, it must be true. Reading my grandmothers Will was one of the worst things I have ever read. It was like my mum was simply rubbed out, erased from her own family. They believed the police narrative that she simply chose to walk away and start a new life. My grandparents died believing their eldest daughter chose to leave them based on what they were told by QLD Missing Persons, The Salvation Army Missing Persons and what I had told them NSW police had told me.

FACT: I want to repeat again - every police officer who touched my mum's case and was called to give evidence at her inquest – not one of them confirmed, when asked, if they ever sighted nor spoke to my mum. Not one police officer ever sighted my mum, checking to make sure she is in fact safe and well as they continued to run with their assumptions and the narrative that she had chosen to leave.

After so many closed doors, telling me 'my hands are tied', 'I will need to work on it in my own time', 'I'm going on leave', 'your mums privacy matters', 'it's not a crime to go missing'; 'it's clear your mum chose to walk away, 'exclaiming my mum is not a priority' and I 'need to accept that'.

What would you do if this was your mum?

April 1st, 2019, The Lady Vanishes podcast launched - it took only 6 weeks for a listener, Joni CONDOS, to find a lonely-hearts ad in the French speaking newspaper, Le Courier Australien, that ran out of Sydney! A man by the name of F REMAKEL, looking for love, potential marriage with a phone number and PO Box in Ballina, NSW.

This turned the entire case on its head!

Even after everything that has been found, the man who admits to having an affair with my mum in early 1997, who has been in prison, who has 53 different aliases, has been granted by Australia 10 passports in 10 fake names, and allegedly stole the identity of a man in Luxembourg named Fernand REMAKEL, I am left believing my mum is still not a priority. Being told that he is too old and will never make it to trial!

And the whole time, a QLD Drivers Licence was sitting within Queensland Transport with this name on it – Fernand REMAKEL. The only other REMAKEL other than my mum's passport that exists in Australia!

One might think that is not a hard find if one took the time to look!

The emotional distress this whole situation has caused not just me, but my brother, my dad, my husband, our three children, my mum's many friends and students and her family – there are simply no words.

It has broken our extended family, my only brother took his own life, I was placed on heart medication during the inquest as my resting heart rate lying down was over 190 beats per minute. I had a node appear on my thyroid and my leptin levels (stress) were off the charts.

My hair has fallen out; my weight has fluctuated. My children have witnessed me at my worst, lying on my bed unable to speak as tears just continued for hours after hearing yet another roadblock in the case put before me.

It has significantly impacted us financially as well. With the inquest being predominantly in Byron Bay and Ballina, during school holidays when accommodation was at its peak. All the while BLUM used his pension card to get a local taxi to and from court, conveniently for him, in his local area. We took multiple flights to Sydney, car hires, accommodation, travel costs, legals, having to prepare for the inquest, taking too many days off work... the list is too long to mention!

On **Monday 17th February 2026**, a bone was found by a young couple near Cherry Street in BALLINA. The couple told the media they were very shaken when they saw what turned out to be a human bone wedge in the rocks where they were fishing. After reporting it to local Ballina police, the police then searched the river and 5 days later found a car in the water that resembles that of missing woman *Cicily Spiers*.

This found bone was less than 6 kilometres from [REDACTED] directly across the river! Yet I did not receive a call to warn me of the possible stress this may cause me or my

family. Media reports and social media making assumptions that the bone must belong to Cicily Spiers before any DNA testing had been confirmed.

This is another absolutely horrendous part of living in the missing space! There is very little care and concern regarding the locating of bones and having them DNA and forensically tested in a timely manner, as well as keeping the public updated! Police are happy to announce the find of human remains, the media love the click bait it draws, but zero follow through with the details for those who have a missing loved one. Most of us relying on the media to keep us informed when our OIC's fail to.

Just another layer of trauma for us to endure and I'm left still asking the questions;

When does this end for me and my family?

Why are authorities not doing more while they still can?

Why doesn't my mum matter to them?

This August (2026) will mark 29 years since I last spoke to my mum, she has been missing ever since.

I thank the Committee for examining this critical issue and trust these insights will assist in improving outcomes for all missing persons and their families now and into the future.

*The information otherwise noted in this submission has been made public throughout the NSW Coronial Inquest that was livestreamed and available still on 'YouTube'. Chanel 7 – Podcast 'The Lady Vanishes' and the '7 Spotlight' program. This also includes 'The Australian' Newspaper who ran more than a dozen stories about my mum and Mr Ric Blum.

*I ask the Committee Clerk to consider any "adverse mention" of those individuals mentioned and consider redactions if required.

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

*I accept the opportunity to speak in person at Grafton on July ^{1st} 2026

In 1997 when my mum went missing there were 15,633 people reported missing throughout Australia. 10 years later in 2007 that number doubled, close to 30,000. Last year in 2025 it was reported that 52,000 people were reported missing in Australia. With statistics suggesting that for every missing person, 12 people are directly impacted. That means last year in Australia 624,000 Australians were directly impacted by a missing person!

By way of moving forward, please accept my following recommendations. As a person with 29 years lived experience, living in the missing space, we are here to be heard, it's time for change, and with that, new attitude towards missing persons in Australia.

We must and can do better!

Recommendations

1. **Establish a Legal Framework for Death in Absentia**

Introduce a clear, accessible, and nationally consistent process allowing families of missing persons to apply for a legal determination of death *in absentia*, including earlier pathways where appropriate and provisions to responsibly lift privacy barriers to assist in investigations.

2. **Implement a Voluntary Disappearance Register**

Develop a secure, government-administered register enabling individuals who intentionally choose to go missing to formally record their decision, reducing unnecessary police resource allocation and providing appropriate reassurance mechanisms.

3. **Reform DNA Testing and Unidentified Human Remains (UHR) Processes**

Mandate a coordinated, fully funded program requiring all unidentified human remains held by NSW Police and Coroners to undergo independent, contemporary forensic testing, supported by transparent reporting and national consistency.

4. **Improve Death Certificate Processes for Missing Persons in NSW**

Create a dedicated, trauma-informed death certificate application pathway for cases involving missing persons, including tailored forms, trained support staff, and clearer post-inquest guidance for families navigating administrative processes.

5. **Support Community Awareness Initiatives – The Green Seat Project**

Provide government recognition and funding support for initiatives such as the Green Seat Project, which deliver meaningful spaces for reflection while raising public awareness and improving community engagement with missing persons cases.

Legal Reform for “Death in Absentia” and Privacy Access in Missing Persons Cases

Understanding “Death in Absentia”

Absentia is a Latin term meaning “in absence.” It is commonly used in legal contexts to describe decisions or proceedings that occur when a person is not physically present.

In most common law jurisdictions, a missing person may be legally declared deceased *in absentia* after a continuous period of seven years. This “seven-year rule” creates a legal presumption of death, enabling families to:

- Finalise estates
- Access life insurance
- Resolve legal and financial matters requiring a death certificate

However, this presumption is not automatic. Courts typically require evidence demonstrating:

- **No Contact:** No communication with those most likely to have heard from the person
- **Diligent Search:** Proof that thorough investigations and reasonable inquiries have been undertaken
- **Unexplained Absence:** No clear reason why the person would deliberately disappear

Exceptions to the seven-year timeframe may apply where strong evidence suggests the person died earlier.

The Problem in Australia

While elements of these principles exist in Australia, there is no **clear, accessible, and nationally consistent pathway** for families to apply for death *in absentia* in a way that meaningfully supports missing persons investigations.

I understand that legislation like **Claudia’s Law (UK)** has influenced provisions in NSW, Victoria, and the ACT under guardianship frameworks. These allow families to manage a missing person’s financial affairs after approximately 90 days.

However, this does not go far enough.

These measures:

- Do not remove broader **privacy barriers**
- Do not provide full access to critical information
- Do not adequately support families trying to actively locate their loved one

Impact of Privacy Restrictions

The most significant barrier faced by families in long-term missing persons cases is **privacy legislation**.

For decades, families are told:

"Your loved one's privacy must be protected; we cannot provide that information."

While privacy is important, in the context of a missing person it can become a **critical obstruction** to finding answers.

In my own case, had I been granted appropriate access as next of kin:

- I could have traced the transfer of **\$80,000** and potentially identified a person of interest
- Access to **Medicare records** could have confirmed appointments, such as an optometrist visit in Grafton, and potentially revealed a new address
- Access to **immigration records** may have confirmed movements in and out of the country and identified changes to identity documentation
- Communication with her **employer** could have clarified important details at the time of her disappearance

Instead, for 27 years, I was met with the same response:

"We cannot tell you anything."

Loss of Evidence Over Time

Compounding this issue, many organisations only retain records for limited periods, often **seven years or less**.

This creates a devastating paradox:

- Families must wait extended periods for legal recognition
- By the time access is granted, **critical evidence may already be destroyed**

In reality, the current system does not just delay answers, it permanently prevents them.

Real-Life Impacts

The consequences of these barriers are not theoretical; they are lived every day:

- **Warren Meyer:** A capable and experienced individual disappears while walking a known track. Years later, loved ones remain without answers, living in hope and uncertainty.

- **Lorin Whitehead:** At just 22 years old, attempts to cancel her missing mother's gym membership were denied because "*your mum needs to close the account herself*" whilst the gym continued to charge her mums bank account through direct debit.
- **My own experience:** My mother's bank continued charging monthly account-keeping fees for 27 years, depleting what little remained of her funds, because she was not formally recognised within the system in a way that allowed intervention.

These examples highlight how the system not only fails to help but can actively worsen the situation.

Proposal for Reform

I propose that the Australian Government implement a **clear, accessible framework for Death in Absentia specifically tailored to missing persons cases**, with the following key features:

1. Earlier Access to Legal Authority

- Allow families to apply for a form of *absentia recognition* earlier than seven years where appropriate
- Enable timely access to critical records while they still exist

2. Lifting Privacy Barriers

- Provide authorised next of kin with controlled access to:
 - Financial records
 - Medical and Medicare information
 - Telecommunications data
 - Employment and government records

This access should be structured, accountable, and purpose-driven, to assist in locating the missing person.

3. Alignment with Law Enforcement

- Ensure police and coronial authorities can work alongside families with fewer restrictions
- Remove duplication and delays caused by fragmented access permissions

4. Accessible and Affordable Process

- Ensure applications are:
 - Low-cost or subsidised
 - Straightforward and clearly explained
 - Supported by appropriate legal and administrative guidance

If the process is overly complex or expensive, it will remain out of reach for many Australian families.

Conclusion

Australia is currently lagging behind comparable jurisdictions in providing meaningful, practical legal pathways for families of missing persons.

The introduction of a clear **Death in Absentia framework**, combined with reform of privacy access, would:

- Improve investigative outcomes
- Prevent loss of critical evidence
- Reduce long-term financial and emotional harm
- Empower families to actively participate in the search for their loved ones

This reform is not about removing privacy, it is about **balancing privacy with the urgent need for truth, safety, and resolution.**

After 27 years of lived experience, I can say with certainty:
The current system does not work.

It is time to change it!

A Register for Missing Persons Who Intentionally Disappear

For 27 years, throughout my efforts to have my mother's case heard at a coronial inquest, I have repeatedly been told: *"It's not a crime to go missing."*

My response has always been: *perhaps that should be reconsidered.*

Currently in Australia, more than 50,000 people are reported missing each year. While it is encouraging that approximately 60% are located within the first 48 hours, many within 24 hours, there remains a significant cohort of long-term missing persons. A person is classified as long-term missing after three months, and currently there are approximately 3,000 individuals in this category.

Despite the scale of this issue, the **financial cost to taxpayers** and the **true resource burden on police** are not transparently reported or publicly discussed. I request that these figures be made publicly available as part of this inquiry.

System Pressures and Resource Constraints

From my lived experience and through engagement with others working in this space, many of whom are volunteers supporting families, it is clear that the system is under significant strain. Families are frequently told that police lack the time and resources to thoroughly investigate cases. There is a perception, and in some cases direct testimony from former officers, that matters are sometimes expedited or closed quickly to meet operational demands and performance targets.

The impact of this approach on families is profound. For those with long-term missing loved ones, the absence of answers and ongoing uncertainty creates lasting distress and a sense of abandonment.

Evidence provided to this inquiry highlights the scale of the challenge. For example, Detective Superintendent Joe Doueihi advised that the NSW Unsolved Homicide Team consists of only 36 detectives responsible for approximately 700 unsolved cases dating back to the 1970s. This equates to an extremely limited capacity for deep, sustained investigation.

This is alarming!

A Proposal for Reform: Voluntary Disappearance Register

I propose the establishment of a **Voluntary Disappearance Register (VDR)**, similar in concept to services such as Crime Stoppers, but designed specifically for individuals who intentionally choose to remove themselves from contact.

At first glance, this idea may seem unconventional. However, it has the potential to deliver significant benefits across multiple areas:

Key Features

- Individuals can voluntarily register their intention to “go missing”
- Identity and wellbeing are verified at the point of registration
- Participation is entirely optional
- The system records that the individual is safe and acting of their own free will
- No penalty is applied where an individual registers appropriately
- Strict privacy protections are maintained

Operational Benefits

- When a missing person report is made, authorities or designated registry staff can check whether the individual has registered
- This reduces unnecessary police deployment in cases where no risk exists
- Police resources can instead be redirected to high-risk or unresolved cases
- Families can receive limited reassurance (where appropriate) that their loved one is safe

Encouraging Accountability and Awareness

To support this model, consideration could also be given to **introducing accountability measures** for individuals who deliberately go missing without notification, particularly in lower-risk situations.

For example, society already accepts laws designed to promote safety and reduce harm, such as mandatory seatbelt use. While individuals may argue it is their choice, non-compliance carries consequences due to the broader societal cost and risk.

Similarly, introducing consequences for knowingly triggering unnecessary missing person investigations while providing a clear, accessible alternative through registration may encourage individuals to reflect on the impact of their actions.

Illustrative Cost Implications

To demonstrate the potential financial impact:

- Assume two police officers respond to a missing person case over a 48-hour period
- At an estimated \$40 per hour over standard shifts, this equates to approximately \$1,280 per case (illustrative only)
- Across 50,000 cases, this suggests a potential cost of \$64 million annually

If even 10% of individuals registered their intention to go missing, this could represent savings of approximately \$6.4 million, in addition to freeing significant police capacity.

While these figures are indicative only, they demonstrate the potential scale of efficiency gains.

Broader Social Benefits

Importantly, the Register would not simply reduce workload, it would also provide a **point of intervention**.

Many individuals who go missing may be experiencing:

- Domestic and family violence
- Mental health crises
- Abuse or coercion

A dedicated registration service could be staffed by trained personnel who can respond with empathy and connect individuals to appropriate support services at the point of contact.

Additionally, the Register could serve as a **central contact point for families**, reducing the burden on police and ensuring families receive timely, compassionate communication.

Conclusion

The current system is placing unsustainable pressure on both law enforcement and families. While many cases are resolved quickly, those that are not leave lasting human and emotional consequences.

A Voluntary Disappearance Register (VDR) represents an opportunity to:

- Improve resource allocation
- Support police in focusing on high-risk cases
- Provide reassurance to families
- Respect individual autonomy while promoting accountability
- Introduce earlier pathways to support for vulnerable individuals

I acknowledge that implementing such a model would require careful design, robust safeguards, and time to develop. However, meaningful reform in this space is long overdue.

With 29 years of lived experience, I remain committed to supporting practical, compassionate solutions. I would welcome the opportunity to contribute further to discussions and development of reforms that better support families, communities, and law enforcement

Unidentified Human Remains (UHR) in NSW

I write in support of concerns raised by others in this inquiry, including those outlined in Joni Condo's submission, regarding the management and testing of unidentified human remains (UHR) in New South Wales. As someone living with a long-term missing loved one, I and many others in this position have **little to no confidence** that this work is being carried out effectively, consistently, or with sufficient urgency.

I therefore propose that **NSW Police and Coroners be required to release all unidentified human remains in their possession for independent forensic testing as a matter of priority.**

Context and National Program Experience

In July 2020, I was honoured to be asked by the Australian Federal Police (AFP) to be the public face of the **National DNA Program for Unidentified and Missing Persons**, launched in Canberra under the leadership of Dr Jodie Ward. This initiative, funded with \$3.6 million from proceeds of crime through the Morrison Government, represented a critical opportunity to address longstanding gaps in forensic identification.

Over its four years of operation:

- 99 unidentified human remains were tested
- More than 50 cases were resolved
- 21 sets of remains were linked to 19 long-term missing persons
- 19 families received confirmation that their loved one was deceased

This demonstrates the **real and measurable impact** that coordinated, properly resourced forensic programs can achieve.

Despite this success, the program concluded in 2024 without further funding.

System Failures and Missed Opportunities

It was deeply distressing to discover that:

- My own DNA sample, provided in 2010, was not included in the national database because it was classified as a *"voluntary sample"*
- Not all states and territories, including NSW, submitted the unidentified remains in their possession for testing under the national program

This represents a critical system failure.

There are approximately **750 unidentified human remains nationally**, with **around 371 currently held in NSW alone** (as listed on the NSW Government UBHR register). These

remain unidentified, with no clear indication of urgency, prioritisation, or coordinated strategy for resolution.

Lack of Transparency and Accountability

During a direct conversation with [REDACTED] of the [REDACTED], I was advised that NSW would not be sending remains to the national program, as they intended to conduct testing internally.

This was approximately six years ago.

As of today, the number of unidentified human remains in NSW remains substantially unchanged.

This raises serious and legitimate questions:

- Why were jurisdictions not required to participate fully in a nationally funded program?
- Why has there been no measurable reduction in unidentified remains despite available technology?
- Why is there no visible urgency to resolve these cases?

Families deserve answers to these questions.

Impact on Families

For those of us living with missing loved ones, the existence of hundreds of unidentified human remains sitting untested is profoundly distressing.

We are left to ask:

What if my loved one is among those remains, stored, untested, and unidentified for decades?

After 29 years of searching, this is not a theoretical concern. It is a daily reality.

Concerns Raised Within the Missing Persons Community

There is growing concern within the missing persons community that reluctance to submit remains for independent testing may be linked to systemic accountability issues, particularly the possibility that identification could expose shortcomings in previous investigations.

While this concern requires careful and impartial examination, it underscores a broader issue: **public confidence in the current system is low.**

Proposal for Immediate Reform

To restore confidence and deliver outcomes, I propose:

1. Mandatory Release for Independent Testing

NSW Police and Coroners should be required to release **all unidentified human remains** for independent forensic testing without delay.

2. Dedicated Government Funding

The NSW Government should allocate specific funding to support this process, ensuring it is:

- Comprehensive
- Time-bound
- Transparent

3. Engagement of Independent Expertise

Independent forensic specialists such as Dr Jodie Ward, now leading the **Forensic Human Identification Co.** should be engaged to undertake this work. Her proven track record through the national program demonstrates both capability and results.

4. Public Reporting and Transparency

Regular public reporting should be implemented to:

- Track progress in testing and identification
- Provide accountability
- Restore public trust

Conclusion

There are currently hundreds of unidentified individuals in NSW who deserve to be named. There are also hundreds of families, like mine, who deserve answers.

The success of the National DNA Program demonstrated what is possible when resources, expertise, and commitment align. The failure to continue and expand that work represents a significant missed opportunity.

This is not simply a forensic issue, it is a matter of **dignity, accountability, and justice.**

Immediate action is required to ensure that these individuals are identified, and that families are no longer left in limbo.

Death Certificate Processes for Missing Persons in NSW

Ambiguous Loss and its Impact

Those of us living with a missing loved one experience what is known as **ambiguous loss**, a form of grief where a person is physically absent but psychologically present. There is no confirmation of life or death, no goodbye, and no closure. As a result, the grieving process is suspended, leaving families caught between hope and acceptance.

This is the reality we carry long before any coronial process begins and importantly, it does not end when an inquest concludes.

The Additional Trauma of the Current System

I wish to bring attention to the **significant and unnecessary trauma** experienced when families are required to apply for a standard Death Certificate following a coronial finding that a missing person is deceased.

In these circumstances, the coroner may determine that a person is deceased based on available evidence, yet:

- There is no body
- There is no confirmed date of death
- There is no known location
- The cause of death may remain undetermined

Being told your loved one is deceased without these answers is already devastating. There are no words for this experience, no body to farewell, no funeral, and no place to grieve.

Families endure the coronial process with courage, often over many years, knowing that without persistence their case may fade from attention. Even after the inquest, we leave with little more than the knowledge that we must wait for formal findings.

A System That Fails to Recognise the Reality of Missing Persons

When those findings are handed down, families are then required to navigate the **standard Births, Deaths and Marriages (BDM) death certificate application process**.

This process is not designed for missing persons and creates further distress.

Applicants are required to answer questions such as:

- Where is the body?
- Who is the funeral director?
- What is the exact date of death?
- What is the cause of death?

For families of missing persons, these questions are not only unanswerable, but they are also deeply triggering. They reflect a system that does not recognise or accommodate the unique circumstances of ambiguous loss.

In my own experience, the process became overwhelming. I encountered barriers when trying to ensure correct details were recorded, and I was forced to repeatedly engage with a system that had **“no box for that”**.

When seeking assistance, staff were not equipped or trained to support someone in this situation. After long wait times, the guidance provided was limited, and the lack of trauma-informed understanding only compounded the distress.

Lack of Support Following Coronial Findings

There is currently **no structured support provided to families** after an inquest concludes. Once proceedings end, families are left to navigate complex administrative systems alone, at a time of profound emotional vulnerability.

This is a critical gap.

Proposal for Reform

To address these issues, I propose the following reforms:

1. Creation of a Missing Persons Death Certificate Category

A **separate Death Certificate process** should be established for cases where a coroner has determined a missing person is deceased.

This certificate should:

- Reflect the unique nature of the case
- Allow for unknown or approximate details (date, location, cause of death)
- Remove the requirement to answer irrelevant or distressing questions
- Be specifically designed with trauma-informed language

2. Dedicated Application Pathway within BDM

Births, Deaths and Marriages should implement a **separate application form and process** for missing persons cases, ensuring:

- Questions are appropriate and relevant
- Systems allow applications to proceed without forcing inaccurate responses
- Staff are trained to support families in these circumstances

3. Mandatory Post-Inquest Support

Following the delivery of coronial findings, families should be:

- Provided with **clear, compassionate guidance** on next steps
- Supported by a **trained staff member** who understands ambiguous loss and administrative requirements
- Guided through processes such as death certification, estate matters, and ongoing case pathways

4. Provision of a Family Support Resource

Families should be given a **support booklet or information pack** before leaving the court, outlining:

- What happens after the inquest
- Practical steps and processes
- Available support services
- Key contacts for assistance

This would ensure that no family leaves the coronial process feeling abandoned or unsure of what comes next.

Conclusion

The current system places an unnecessary and harmful burden on families who have already endured years, sometimes decades, of uncertainty and grief.

Requiring families of missing persons to navigate a standardised death certification process that does not reflect their reality is not only inefficient, but also **trauma-inducing and avoidable**.

Reform in this area would:

- Reduce distress for families
- Improve administrative accuracy
- Provide dignity and recognition to missing persons and their loved ones
- Demonstrate a more compassionate, modern, and responsive system

Living with a missing loved one is already an isolating and complex journey. Providing appropriate, trauma-informed processes and support is not just good policy, it is essential care

The Green Seat Project

When I first approached my local council, Brisbane City Council, to discuss the need for a place to remember my missing mother, I was referred to a memorial they had funded and created in a cemetery on the north side of Brisbane. I was advised that this would be an appropriate place for me to go to remember her.

With respect, this is not a trauma-informed response for someone whose loved one is missing.

Being directed to a cemetery when there is **no body, no grave, and no confirmed place of rest**, does not provide comfort. Instead, it can intensify the distress and emotional conflict experienced by those living with ambiguous loss. It reinforces the finality of death in a situation where there has been no physical confirmation, no goodbye, and no opportunity to lay a loved one to rest.

This experience highlighted for me a significant gap in how we support families of missing persons.

In 2024 alone, it is estimated that **624,000 people were impacted by a missing person in Australia**. This is not a marginal issue, it is widespread, deeply felt, and ongoing. The need for appropriate, compassionate, and relevant spaces for reflection is not only justified, but also essential.

It was from this lived experience that **The Green Seat Project** was created.

I have been developing this initiative over the past 12 months as a **community-based awareness and reflection program** designed to honour missing persons and support the families who continue to search for them.

The concept is simple but deeply meaningful: the installation of a **green bench seat** in a public, peaceful location. Each seat is inscribed with the words *"The Missing Matter"* and includes a **QR code** linking directly to our website, **www.themissingmatter.com**, where members of the public can learn more about missing persons and the stories behind them.

In February 2024, the NSW State Coroner declared my mother deceased. Despite this finding, I have no body to bury, no grave to visit, no memorial to attend. There is no physical place to go to remember her, only an absence. I am not alone in this experience. There are many families across **Australia and internationally** living with that same empty, unresolved space.

The Green Seat Project was created to address that absence.

It provides:

- **A place of reflection** for families and loved ones
- **A physical space to grieve**, remember, and connect
- **A symbol of hope** for those still searching
- **A public reminder** that missing persons are not forgotten

Each seat is intentionally positioned in a location of natural beauty, offering a quiet and supportive environment where people can sit, reflect, and take a moment away from the ongoing trauma of not knowing.

The Role of the QR Code and Data Integrity

The inclusion of a QR code on each Green Seat is a critical component of the project. While it directs users to **The Missing Matter** website, its purpose goes beyond awareness, it addresses a significant and ongoing issue within the missing persons system: **the accuracy of publicly available information**.

Through lived experience and ongoing work in the missing persons space including hosting *The Missing Matter Podcast* and engaging directly with families, it has become evident that **current missing persons profiles on both AFP and NSW Police platforms often contain inaccuracies**. These errors can be deeply distressing for families and, importantly, may compromise public awareness and investigative outcomes.

A personal example highlights this concern.

On **4 May 2026**, I was invited to State Crime Command in Parramatta for the announcement of a **\$1 million reward** in relation to my mother's case. During that event, my mother's profile was displayed on a revolving screen within the foyer. In that moment, I observed two factual errors:

- Her **date of birth** was recorded as 1946, when in fact she was born in 1945
- Her **last known bank transaction** was listed as occurring in Ashmore on the Gold Coast, when the coroner had determined it occurred in **Byron Bay, New South Wales**

These are not minor inconsistencies, these are **key identifying details** that can influence public recognition, tip-offs, and investigative pathways.

Additionally, I observed inconsistencies in how information is presented more broadly. Some profiles highlighted the existence of a monetary reward in red, while others did not. At the time, my mother already had a **\$500,000 reward in place**, yet this was not clearly indicated on her profile.

Through further research and engagement with other families, I have identified **numerous similar inaccuracies across multiple cases**. This is deeply concerning.

A Community-Led Response

The Green Seat Project, through **The Missing Matter**, is now working directly with families of missing persons in a **gentle, respectful, and trauma-informed way** to:

- Confirm that publicly listed details about their loved one are accurate
- Identify and correct inconsistencies where possible
- Add a **personal paragraph explaining why their missing loved one matters**

This additional layer is critical.

Current profiles tend to focus on physical descriptors such as height, hair colour, eye colour. While important, these details alone do not fully engage the public.

By adding personal context, stories, and meaning, we:

- **Humanise the missing person**
- Strengthen community connection
- Encourage greater public attention and recall

The QR code on each Green Seat provides access to these **enhanced, family-informed profiles**, sitting alongside not replacing, official AFP and state police platforms. There is **no intention to override or compete with official systems**, but rather to complement them and improve public engagement and accuracy.

Progress and Community Support

The response to the Green Seat Project has been overwhelmingly positive.

- The first Green Seat was installed at **The Spit on the Gold Coast** in October 2025, fully funded and supported by the Gold Coast Waterways Authority
- In March 2026, following a deputation to **Clarence Valley Council** in Grafton, two Green Seats were unanimously approved
- In April 2026, the **first international Green Seat** was unveiled on the Isle of Bute in Scotland

Support continues to grow across Australia and beyond, with interest from:

- Rockhampton and Yeppoon
- Ballina, Kiama, and Gerringong
- Taree, Moreton Bay, and Ipswich
- Hunter Valley, Port Adelaide Enfield, Ballarat, and others

International discussions are underway in London, the broader United Kingdom, Scotland and New Zealand.

There are currently **over 15 additional locations under consideration.**

Proposal for Support

Given the demonstrated impact and growing demand, I propose that:

- **NSW Government funding and support be made available** to facilitate the installation of Green Seats across the state
- Local councils be encouraged to partner in identifying appropriate locations
- The initiative be recognised as part of a broader strategy to improve awareness, support, and community engagement in the missing person's space

This is a low-cost, high-impact initiative delivering **real social and emotional value.**

Conclusion

The Green Seat Project ensures that those who are missing are neither invisible nor forgotten. It creates a space not just for grief, but for connection, reflection, and hope.

For families like mine, these spaces matter deeply.

My mum matters.

Marion Matters.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my submission. I acknowledge that revisiting these experiences to contribute to this inquiry has been extremely difficult. However, I do so in the hope that meaningful change can come from it, for families, for communities, and for all those still missing.

Thank you for hearing us.

Sally Leydon

For consideration additional information regarding Warren Meyer:

My name is Zanette (Zee) Meyer wife of Warren Meyer who has been missing for 18 years, 23rd March 2008 at Dom Dom Saddle in Victoria, an area he knew well. We were holidaying with eight friends at Healesville; an Easter Sunday tradition for Warren was to choose an easy walk in the morning before meeting the rest of us for a special lunch. We had all been going away together for around 20 years.

Warren was declared deceased at the end of 2017 after a protracted coronial finding was passed down without inquest. He left behind two children who were in early adulthood. As an owner of a successful Civil Engineering business, he left a void in the practice, staff who were traumatised, a business partner trying to navigate a way forward, alongside me as the financial administrator. We consulted solicitors, barristers, accountants and others who had never come across such a case. There was no blueprint for any of it, and all were learning. It was traumatic emotionally and very costly.

On a personal note, and not something I want to necessarily discuss publicly, but to honour a memory, I tell of the suicide in 2018 of a caring in-house solicitor from the Coroner's Court of Victoria, who had been our legal team's contact for 5 years by then. Through her, we were making appeals to the coroner to move Warren's sluggish case forward, as day to day living in limbo had become intolerable. There seemed to be no understanding or empathy. A suicide note written by Jessica (surname withheld) outlined much dysfunction in the court, including the handing down of unsatisfactory findings. The court was fined the maximum penalty, just under \$400,000, for allowing a toxic, unsafe workplace. And it was this environment my unsuspecting family walked into. Sally Leydon has extensive knowledge of the police handling of Warren's case. We thank her for raising many issues, some of which will not be highlighted by me. I recap some significant events.

1. Little profiling of Warren and family, the environment with wide open tracks throughout and benign weather conditions.

Experiential bias led to ignoring the site where Warren's car was found at Dom Dom Saddle, leading to contamination of the search site. An abandoned vehicle parked next to Warren's vehicle, was overlooked, later found to belong to men with an extensive criminal history. Through family pressure these people were finally interviewed about 13 years later, during the COVID era, by interstate police.

2. A costly police time-frame error leading to the exclusion of an absconder from a psyche ward who had been loitering in the area, later found to be planning to kill strangers. When located in the week Warren went missing, he was returned to hospital, absconded on two more occasions, finally taking a vehicle and going bush for three days. He then volunteered to come back to hospital. All this not investigated because police wrongfully believed that Warren and this man did not have time to contact one another. This only rectified during the COVID era when it was finally agreed by all parties, family, a private investigator, and police, that there was thirty minutes of potential contact. Today these matters sit gathering dust in a police file.

3. An out-of-control shooting event took place on a walking track well known to Warren. It was heard by residents searching for Easter eggs, so alarming and close that they ushered six children into the house. It lasted about nine minutes. The residents reported this by going to Lilydale Police Station on March 30th, 2008. Police did not visit the site, even though the residents reported an empty campsite with evidence of a campfire. No police statements were taken; cursory statements were to come 8 months down the track when we were contacted by the residents. We then asked police to act. This shooting along Monda Track is noteworthy for a few other reasons- the residents took us there in October 2008, in fact we spent the day there waiting for the one and only detective on our case to turn up. He never came. It is an area where my nephew on a search shortly after Warren had

gone missing smelt a strong odour. Finally, SARDA search dogs have alerted four times in 2023-2024 to the odour of human remains. Police do not believe in the dogs.

I conclude by saying we are stuck in limbo because of the mishandling of our case. There is much evidence to suggest suspicious activity, not the line police have used, that Warren has got lost and succumbed to the elements. (There was only an initial 5-day search to find him.) I stress that if investigative urgency had been there from the start, we believe our case could have been solved.

I am in my mid-seventies now. I believe I will die not knowing what has happened to my husband, who is the beloved father of my children, the grandfather of my grandchildren, who have never got to know him. I cannot think of a greater pain than that of not knowing. This inquiry is worthy.

I give permission to all involved in this inquiry to use details of Warren's case to garner a greater understanding of the missing, this to achieve better outcomes into the future.

Kind regards,

Zee Meyer