

Submission
No 66

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

Name: Name suppressed
Date Received: 25 April 2026

Partially
Confidential

Committee: Portfolio Committee No. 1 - Premier and Finance

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

Introduction

I initially made contact with Sally Leydon in January 2020, offering my assistance with research into the disappearance of her mother, Marion Barter. I have also provided assistance to the families of missing persons Theo Hayez and Janine Vaughan and Bronwyn Winfield, but this submission mainly relates to the investigation of the Marion Barter case.

I first became interested in Marion's case after listening to several episodes of the podcast "The Lady Vanishes". It became apparent to me that to help move the investigation forward certain unknowns needed to be resolved; namely the owner of a post office box at Lennox Head and a Ballina phone number as mentioned within an advertisement placed by one M F Remakel in the French newspaper Le Courier Australien. Credit for finding that advertisement goes to Joni Condos, another researcher who came on board to assist Sally, also after listening to The Lady Vanishes podcast.

I subsequently found the owner of the Ballina phone number, and I think it is important to explain the methodology I used because it was a simple exercise and realistically could have been carried out by virtually anyone who had the time and willingness to make the effort. I located copies of the early to mid 1990's telephone directories for the North Coast region. I created a computer file folder for each directory containing the individual white pages photo images created using my mobile phone camera and converted those images to text files using optical character recognition software. I then undertook a folder search for the required phone number and found several business owners for the number over various years, including (for 1995) Ballina Coin Investments Pty Ltd. As the owner of the number was a company, I undertook a company search to determine the names of the Directors and found that one was born in Tournia (sic) Belgium. That person was named Frederick David de Hedervary, later to be known as Ric BLUM.

At that stage I contacted Sally and provided the information to her and Joni. Sally has literally hundreds of people who have provided information and assistance to her,

which I understand (as regards information) she has forwarded on to police. Many of those people would have specialist expertise and offered their professional services to assist, pro bono.

I have also spoken to the real estate agent whose business leased the house at Wollongbar in late 1996 and can confirm that their daughter was in the local swimming club, as mentioned at the Inquest, and I have spoken to a next door neighbour to that Wollongbar property. Neither person had been spoken to by police; possibly a function of limited police resources.

Response to the Terms of Reference

This submission provides information in response to the following abbreviated Terms of Reference:

1. current and emerging developments in policy, practice and technology in relation to unsolved murders and long term missing persons
2. whether there existed impediments in the criminal justice system that impacted the delivery of justice to victims and their families
3. the progress of police investigations into the unsolved murders and long term missing persons cases

A combined response to these Terms of Reference is as follows:

It has become apparent to me that the current policing system as relates to missing persons (and possible related murders) needs to change. Generally, subsequent to a podcast or extensive media coverage of a case via social media, numerous members of the public come forward to offer assistance to the families of the missing person. Consequently, in consideration of the limited resources that the police have to investigate long term missing persons cases (person missing for more than 90 days), I make the following suggestions to hopefully improve outcomes:

1. The next of kin or a person appointed by the next of kin of a missing person (let's call them the Family Contact Person) to be given full access to all material in the relevant missing person's file held by police (potentially embargoed to protect the integrity of the case – non disclosure).
2. The Family Contact Person to have the authority to select a suitable group of assistants and to share the provided information with them. I note that it would be ideal if some of the members of the public in the assistants group lived in the area of residence of the missing person (also requiring them sign a non-disclosure on the information).

3. Where police identify research actions which could aid their investigation and they do not have the resources to carry out such research, they could choose to liaise with the Family Contact Person so arrangements could be made to undertake that research.

I note that step 3. may require a change in policing procedures. I had approached police with an offer to assist in determining likely vehicles of interest as related to the Janine Vaughan case after determining that the images from the video of the vehicle which picked Janine up, needed to be scaled because of the tilt of the video camera. I offered (at no cost to police) to compare all vehicles used by persons of interest in that case with the scaled images of the vehicle, only to be told that the makes and models of those vehicles could not be supplied to me as I had not been contracted to work for the police. I don't believe there would have been any privacy issues involved in providing the data as the names of the owners were not relevant to the exercise, so what really was the problem?

It appears to me that privacy issues are a constraint to effective investigation of missing persons cases; does the legislation need to change where there is an over-riding public interest in information being made public? I don't understand why anyone would seek to restrict access to information which could help resolve such an important matter as a missing person case. As an example, it would appear that there were issues with subpoenaing the children of the main interested party (Ric Blum) in the Marion Barter case to appear at the inquest into her disappearance. In my opinion they could have been invaluable witnesses as they were living with their father in 1997 when Marion disappeared, and although it appears that they were interviewed by police I think it was reasonable that Sally Leydon, (through her legal representation) had the option to ask them questions in Court. I believe they hold important information as regards the whereabouts of their father and his method of transport between the time of his arrival back into Australia (31 July 1997) and late October 1997. To take this a bit further, evidence was given at the inquest that an additional vehicle (a Mitsubishi Magna) was purchased on 11 August 1997 and that the vehicle the family already owned at that time (a Nissan Bluebird station wagon) was sold within a short period after that date. This statement does not accord with other available evidence, that the vehicle was offered for sale some 9 months later. Where was that second car garaged; if it was in the double garage of the unit the family resided in after leaving Wollongbar, surely the children would have known, and I have no doubt they would have made better witnesses than those who made an art form out of obfuscation. If the Bluebird was not in a garage of that unit, where was it and why wasn't it at the family home?

Having listened to the Marion Barter inquest numerous times and thus the testimony of the main interested party, I feel that Marion Barter was obviously subjected to coercive control and that is the reason she made no attempt to contact her family after returning to Australia on 2 August 1997. I'm surprised that no comment was made by the Coroner in her Findings to the Inquest about the likelihood of Marion being manipulated by coercive control. The Coroner did, however, indicate numerous circumstances wherein

she didn't accept the truthfulness of the testimony given by the main interested party at the Inquest. However, there was no recommendation that the police should actively pursue any charges of making false statements or perjury against him.

Identified Gaps, Challenges, and Systemic Issues

I believe the main issues which need to be addressed to help reduce the large number of missing persons cases relate to the interaction between police and the family and friends of the missing person and the unwillingness of police to provide information regarding the investigation to them. Search for the missing needs to be a team effort with a win-win when the missing person is found or answers are otherwise provided.

Many of the people who are willing to offer assistance to the family of the missing could have skill sets which the police may not have been able to access owing to lack of funding / resources applicable to the subject case. The best research asset the police can have is the public. It is the public who are expected to provide the "breakthrough clue" when a long term missing case becomes a cold case; that is, it is active without actual ongoing investigation, and generally low priority.

Recommendations

- As soon as a person becomes long term missing, police fully engage with the designated family contact person and provide all relevant investigation information to that person to allow them to assist with the investigation with selected assistants, where practicable, as outlined above.
- Amend legislation as regards restrictions on availability of information to the next of kin of long term missing persons
- Amend legislation to allow police to access all social media files and phone data for a missing person from the time a missing person report is made to police.
Note: This action may help reduce the number of people who go missing without advising family or friends – any change to the law should be widely advertised.

Conclusion

Thanks for the opportunity to make this submission which is based on suggestions for changed policies and legislation, directed in accordance with the processes being adopted by those who are at the forefront of investigations by the public into the missing and murdered eg podcasters and documentary makers.

Permissions and Confidentiality

I consent to this submission being published anonymously.

Signature: 20 March 2026