



QUEENSLAND POLICE SERVICE

MEDIA STATEMENT

1 February 2023

Death of Gwen Grover

15.00

Enquiry from Alison Sandy, Seven Network

I'm doing a series of news stories and podcast on the death of Gwen Grover. My news package is also looking at the way cold cases are handled by QPS, especially in reference to the following:

See Part A

I am requesting an on-camera interview with the Commissioner of Police about these issues. The deadline for that is the end of next week (3 Feb).

Meanwhile, I have the following questions for response. Please respond to them numerically in the same order of the questions so the answers can't be taken out of context. Can you please provide those by COB on Friday this week (27 Feb)?

See Part B

The following can be attributed to a QPS spokesperson:

Part A:

- **How families of victims are treated:**

The loss of a family member affects every family differently, and families of those who have experienced the loss of a loved one from homicide is complex for many reasons.

Cold case investigations are different to homicide investigations as they are linked to historical offences, where the offender or suspect has not been identified or there is insufficient evidence to commence a prosecution and further information is required to allow the investigation to proceed.

Detectives from the Cold Case Investigation Team (CCIT) build and maintain good relationships with families of victims, providing ongoing support and advice over an extended period of time. Many families assist police with investigative strategies as part of case reviews. Where appropriate, victim families are referred to Queensland Homicide Victims Support Group (QHVSF).

The CCIT is committed to investigating unsolved homicides and bringing answers to the families of those victims.

- **How difficult it is to get QPS to change its mind about the circumstances surrounding a death in contrast to the decision that was made at the outset:**

CCIT commence every investigation with an open mind and have no difficulty in affecting change to decisions made during a prior investigation. The very nature of a cold case investigation accepts evidence may exist that is yet to be discovered or previous investigations may have drawn incorrect conclusions. CCIT investigators choose to work on these difficult investigations with the mindset of discovering the truth and prosecuting offenders.

This is evident through both the arrests of multiple offenders for murder and numerous referrals of cold case and other investigations to the State Coroner.



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- **How many deaths that were written off as suicide/accident where it's been proven or strongly suspected that it's actually homicide:**

In the instance there is proof or any suspicion of homicide, an investigation will not be closed, but rather charges would be preferred against the offender or investigations would continue.

- **How difficult it is for police who suspect such decisions are wrong to get the support required to further investigate:**

CCIT investigators regularly liaise with Homicide Investigation Unit management during the investigative process and provide an indication of the direction, lines of inquiry and case theories of the investigation.

The CCIT investigative process by its very nature accepts the probability that previous investigations may have drawn incorrect conclusions. CCIT management support is evident through both the arrests of multiple offenders for murder and numerous referrals of cold case and other investigations to the State Coroner.

- **The difficulty in spreading resources to these areas where there is so much demand elsewhere.**

The CCIT is attached to the Homicide Investigation Unit and part of the Crime and Intelligence Command's Homicide Group. The Homicide Group has sufficient staff and resources to deliver professional policing services across the state.

Part B:

1. **In a series of emails obtained under Right to Information laws, QPS' Cold Case team Investigation Team referred to the investigation into Gwen Grover's death as the "suicide of Gwen Grover".
Can you explain why this assumption was made and how it affected the investigation?**

No assumption was made, and no malice was intended in Gwen Grover's death being documented in internal email correspondence as 'suicide of Gwen Grover'. On 31 January 1984, after reviewing the original coronial report completed by then Constable Ed Kinbacher, Coroner BJ Scanlan determined there were no suspicious circumstances surrounding the death of Gwen.

A review of further investigative emails also referred to Gwen's death as:

- Coronial Investigation
- Coronial Direction
- Gwen Grover
- Suicide Review
- Death
- Death Investigation
- Cold Case
- Sierra Storm

How CCIT refer to investigations in internal email correspondence had no effect on the conduct of an investigation. CCIT members are experienced and dedicated police officers who behave ethically and responsibly in the execution of their duties. All investigations, whether cold case homicides or referrals from the State Coroner are meticulously considered with an open mind during the entirety of the investigation.

2. **I refer to a series of emails from Det Snr Sgt Tara Kentwell head of QPS CCIT to colleagues:**

- **On April 23, 2020 she said: "We are fortunate to have been given this treasure by the State Coroner." Followed by a smiley face emoji;**

A review of the email in its entirety reveals the comment intended no malice and in no way indicated the investigation was a waste of time. The email is between two senior investigators who have known each other



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for some 30 years, and as such contains some informal content. Detective Senior Sargent (DSS) Kentwell, as Operations Leader CCIT, has dedicated the past five and a half years to leading her team to progress Queensland's outstanding cold cases. The arrest of multiple offenders for murder and numerous referrals of cold case and other investigations to the State Coroner support this. DSS Kentwell confirms the term treasures is meant literally in this context and she feels extremely fortunate to hold such a meaningful position where she can support the QPS in finding resolution for families of murder victims. The smiley face emoji corroborates her words. In the following sentence, DSS Kentwell then asks the DSS when he is available to discuss the investigation.

- **When first informed by email that the Attorney General has ordered a Coronial Inquest be held into the death of Gwen Grover... and that her Cold Case team would create Operation Sierra Storm to investigate. "Sigh!!!!!"**

A review of the email in its entirety reveals the comment intended no malice and in no way indicated the investigation was a waste of time. The email is between two senior investigators who have also known each other for some 30 years, and as such contains some informal content. DSS Tara Kentwell as Operations Leader CCIT has dedicated the past five and a half years to leading her team to progress Queensland's outstanding cold cases. The arrests of multiple offenders for murder and numerous referrals of cold case and other investigations to the State Coroner support this. At the time of receiving this email, DSS Kentwell was aware that the State Coroner had referred the matter to CCIT and was awaiting the arrival of formal advice. During this period all QPS members were heavily involved in the response to the Covid-19 pandemic. While acknowledging the importance of the Covid response, the reply of 'Sigh!!!!!' was an indication of frustration at not being able to respond to this and other investigations due to the ongoing nature of the QPS response to a worldwide pandemic. When possible, the investigation was subsequently allocated to an investigator within CCIT and an investigation was commenced.

- **And January 23, 2021, another Cold Case team member, Detective Senior Constable David Rolleston, emailed this to his senior colleague Mark Brand: "*Just a thought. Maybe we get XXXXX to comment on how much beer Gwen might drink in a usual session. How drunk would she get and what type of drunk she was. Happy, sad, angry, also could she still operate while drunk or fall into a heap. This addresses the family thought that if she was so drunk, she couldn't have operated a gun.*"**

A review of the email in its entirety reveals the comment intended no malice and in no way indicated the investigation was a waste of time. Detective Senior Constable (DSC) David Rolleston is a well-regarded and experienced investigator, attached to CCIT for the past five years. The level of intoxication and the effect of alcohol, with reference to Gwen's ability to handle a firearm, was a viable line of inquiry in this investigation and explored an issue raised by the family. This email comment is part of an ongoing discussion between investigators on this point and is appropriate in that context. The question raised by DSC Rolleston is '*could she still operate while drunk?*'. A statement was subsequently obtained from Sharon Mackenzie and included in the Report to the Coroner (Witness 11).

- **The emails imply that the CCIT thought the investigation was a waste of time.**
Please explain how this approach is appropriate for an impartial, objective police investigation?

The CCIT investigation into the death of Gwen Grover at the direction of the State Coroner was undertaken professionally and in an impartial and objective manner. CCIT's core responsibility is to proficiently review cold cases and investigations referred by the State Coroner. A considerable period of time was allocated to this investigation with extensive inquiries conducted. A total of 53 people were identified by CCIT during the review - 17 of these people were identified as deceased and a further 16 statements were taken from 12 witnesses. A comprehensive forensic review was completed and a thorough Report to the Coroner was submitted by CCIT.

On December 9 2021, Northern Coroner Nerida Wilson determined Gwen Grover died as a result of 'cerebral destruction caused by a self-inflicted bullet wound to the head. Her death is due to suicide. She was affected by alcohol at the time, her toxicology analysis being .15%, or over three times over the current legal limit for driving. At the time of her death Mrs Grover was overwhelmed by the circumstances of her life and experiencing a significant situational crisis'.



Coroner Wilson noted that the CCIT investigation was most comprehensive and meticulously undertaken.

3. Why wasn't any possibility other than suicide considered as part of the investigations into Gwen Grover's death?

During this investigation (as with all CCIT investigations), CCIT members kept an open mind and remained receptive to all information gleaned. The reason for the review was to consider the possibility of involvement of others in the death of Gwen Grover, and for that reason extensive investigations were conducted into the firearm, relevant relationships and state of mind of Gwen.

4. Did the CCIT do a criminal record check on Ken Soper? If not, why not? If so, why wasn't it included in the report to the Coroner?

CCIT did conduct a criminal history check on Ken Soper. No criminal histories of any witness were provided to the State Coroner. The details of Ken Soper's 1981 criminal history had been available to investigators at the time of Gwen Grover's death in 1983.

5. Gwen Grover's defacto at the time, Ken Soper was a convicted paedophile and that conviction was only a year old when Gwen Grover died, how could this be considered irrelevant by QPS?

During this investigation (as with all CCIT investigations), CCIT members kept an open mind and remained receptive to all information gleaned.

6. The CCIT spoke to Ken Soper's ex-wife Pamela Douglass who said he was a violent man. Why wasn't that included in the CCIT's report to the Coroner? I have since interviewed his ex-wife Pamela Douglass who told me the following:

"Oh, he was incredibly violent. He, he was a horrible, horrible man. And you know, this is something that I don't talk about ever to anybody. He, he was found guilty of indecent dealing with my oldest child. "You think you should be able to talk about these things in the past. But no, he was definitely violent. You know, just the escape from him was quite a story in itself. How we got away, because I had four children. But anyway, we did. So, I was very pleased to be able to get away. We, I had discovered what was happening to my daughter and I got her out of the house, and he twigged that something that I, twigged to something you know! I certainly couldn't confront him with it because it would have been, just would have slaughtered us. Yes, he bashed me a few times, which was, you know, like I said, you think... well dealing with it yourself it's not... it's not, something that you, you think you just kind of put up with it. But when I realized it was directly to the kids, not just indirectly, that's, that's when I left. He once to put a rifle in my mouth. Yes." When I asked Pamela if she told the Cold Case Investigation Team any of this, she replied: "There wasn't a lot of questioning, they did ask me if he if he was violent. And I said he was, I don't think I told them about the rifle incident. I can't remember, it just, it just all came so much out of the blue, I think oh my god you know, do I have to think back to then. But I didn't talk about any of the stuff I've just shared with you."

On August 6 2020, CCIT investigators attended the residence of Pamela Douglass where they spoke with her in relation to this matter. Pamela, whilst aware of this matter stated that she has no direct knowledge of it as she had left Cairns prior to the Gwen's death and as such did not want to provide a statement. This information was outlined in the Report to the Coroner and Pamela Douglass was nominated as Witness 22. The context of providing information and a sworn statement to police investigating a murder is significantly different to providing her opinion and generalised information to a journalist.

7. Why wasn't an alibi ever established and checked for Ken Soper?

CCIT investigators obtained a statement from Ken Soper on August 17 2020 where he provided the name of an alibi. Although extensive inquiries were conducted to identify the person, they could not be located.

8. Why wasn't Ken Soper ever considered a suspect?

During this investigation (as with all CCIT investigations), CCIT members kept an open mind and remained receptive to all information gleaned. The reason the investigation was referred to CCIT was to consider the



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possibility of the involvement of others in the death of Gwen Grover. Consideration was given to persons associated with the deceased.

9. QPS sent flowers to Ken Soper's widow when he died. Why did they do that? Please provide the QPS policy on sending flowers and/or gifts to the next of kin of traffic fatality victims?

The QPS has no record of flowers being sent to Ken Soper's widow.

There is no QPS policy on sending flowers and/or gifts to the next of kin of traffic fatality victims.

10. How many flowers/gifts were sent by QPS to the next of kin of traffic fatality victims in 2022?

The QPS has no record of flowers sent to next of kin of traffic fatality victims in 2022.



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