

Dr Kirsty Wright has been excluded from serving on the Forensic Science Queensland advisory board as a result of a recommendation from the commission of inquiry that it include eminent forensic scientists "from jurisdictions other than Queensland". Does the Minister support this, or should this be reviewed and/or reversed?

Is it lawful to exclude Queensland scientists from the board?

Does the Minister have any comment on concerns raised in The Weekend Australian that Forensic Science Queensland chief executive Professor Linzi Wilson-Wilde failed in her expert report to the inquiry to mention a catastrophic extraction method flaw that she observed that has since been blamed for failures in the Shandee Blackburn investigation and thousands of other criminal cases?

Regards

--

**DAVID MURRAY**  
National Crime Correspondent

Cnr Mayne Road & Campbell Street Bowen Hills QLD 4006  
GPO Box 130, Brisbane, QLD 4001

**Irrelevant**  
E **Irrelevant**@theaustralian.com.au W [theaustralian.com.au](http://theaustralian.com.au)

**Follow us online**

**Subscribe to The Australian**

<~WRD0003.jpg>

<~WRD0003.jpg>

<~WRD0003.jpg>

---

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land in all states and territories on which we work and report. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past, present and emerging, and honour their history, cultures, and traditions of storytelling.

Proudly supporting [1 degree](http://1degree.com.au), A News Corp Australia initiative.

<~WRD0003.jpg>

This message and its attachments may contain legally privileged or confidential information. It is intended solely for the named addressee. If you are not the addressee indicated in this message or responsible for delivery of the message to the addressee, you may not copy or deliver this message or its attachments to anyone. Rather, you should permanently delete this message and its attachments and kindly notify the sender by reply e-mail. Any content of this message and its attachments which does not relate to the official business of the sending company must be taken not to have been sent or endorsed by that company or any of its related entities. No warranty is made that the e-mail or attachments are free from computer virus or other defect.

**Theresa Stinson**

---

**From:** Amanda Medew  
**Sent:** Monday, 18 September 2023 9:39 AM  
**To:** Natarjsha Kramer  
**Subject:** FW: DNA progress report  
**Attachments:** image003.png; TPs - DNA COI Progress Report.docx; QAs First Progress Report - Delivery of recommendations Col Forensic DNA Testing (FINAL).docx; MR - DNA progress report.docx

Can you print and bring in, as well as the media response from yesterday.

Amanda

---

**From:** Shannon Fentiman **Irrelevant** @ministerial.qld.gov.au>  
**Sent:** Monday, September 18, 2023 8:11 AM  
**To:** Natarjsha Kramer **Irrelevant** @ministerial.qld.gov.au>  
**Cc:** Amanda Medew **Irrelevant** @ministerial.qld.gov.au>; Phoenix Campbell **Irrelevant** @ministerial.qld.gov.au>; Olivia Amsden **Irrelevant** @ministerial.qld.gov.au>; Rachel Western **Irrelevant** @ministerial.qld.gov.au>  
**Subject:** Re: DNA progress report

Thanks - can you have this printed for me? Amanda do we have letter to the Clerk for tabling?

Shannon

On 18 Sep 2023, at 7:59 am, Natarjsha Kramer **Irrelevant** @ministerial.qld.gov.au> wrote:

Sent from my iPhone

Begin forwarded message:

**From:** Natarjsha Kramer **Irrelevant** @ministerial.qld.gov.au>  
**Date:** 17 September 2023 at 6:57:00 pm AEST  
**To:** Shannon Fentiman **Irrelevant** @ministerial.qld.gov.au>  
**Cc:** Phoenix Campbell **Irrelevant** @ministerial.qld.gov.au>, Amanda Medew **Irrelevant** @ministerial.qld.gov.au>  
**Subject:** DNA progress report

Hey,

Just making sure you've got these – have added slight changes – but let me know if you have more to add.

**Natarjsha Kramer**

Principal Media Advisor

**Office of the Hon. Shannon Fentiman MP**

Minister for Health, Mental Health and Ambulance Services

Minister for Women

**Irrelevant** @ministerial.qld.gov.au



**XX September 2023**

**Forensic Services Queensland restoring confidence in the criminal justice system**

- Significant progress has been made on the delivery of recommendations by the Commission of Inquiry into Forensic DNA Testing in Queensland.
- More than 70 per cent of the independent inquiry's recommendations are either underway or completed.
- Over \$190 million has now been committed to deliver world class forensic services.

The Queensland Government has made significant inroads into reforming its forensic DNA testing services, with an additional \$94.5 million announced today to continue this important reform.

The first progress report, tabled in parliament today, outlines work done in response to the Commission of Inquiry into Forensic DNA Testing in Queensland, conducted by Walter Sofronoff KC.

The inquiry's final report, delivered in December 2022, highlighted flawed forensic DNA testing procedures and their impacts on the criminal justice system.

The government accepted all 123 recommendations made in the report, and made an immediate initial investment of more than \$100 million to support implementation.

To date, 33 have been completed, and a further 57 recommendations are currently underway.

Progress includes ceasing the practice of using any quantitation threshold that stopped further processing of DNA samples, the establishment of Forensic Services Queensland supported by an interim advisory board and expert sub committees, as well as the development of quality, innovation and biology leadership to drive reform of process and practice.

The remaining recommendations focus on long-term reform and are dependent on legislative reform and progress of other recommendations. This includes renewing forensic science infrastructure; enhancing information technology platforms; managing current criminal justice system impacts; and strengthening the quality and scientific integrity of forensic services.

A large-scale recruitment drive is also underway to source scientists to staff FSQ and help implement recommendations relating to scientific processes. 27 scientists have been employed to date, with this new investment allowing the recruitment of the scientists and support required to continue implementation of the recommendations.

Any person affected by these matters, including concerned victims, who would like to access support can contact the Queensland Police Service hotline on 1300 993 191.

The progress report can be viewed at XXXX

**Quotes attributable to the Minister for Health, Mental Health and Ambulance Services and Minister for Women Shannon Fentiman:**

“It is paramount that Queenslanders have confidence in our justice system.

“The newly established Forensic Services Queensland headed by eminent scientist Professor Wilson-Wilde, is putting in place appropriate structures to deliver what we want in a forensic DNA service – integrity, transparency, accountability and quality.

“I am grateful for everyone who has been working incredibly hard under challenging circumstances to continue providing services that are critical to the health and justice systems.

“Victims of crime can be assured that addressing the issues identified by the Commission of Inquiry are a priority for this government.

“We have already seen significant work carried out, including the identification of serious offenders.

“There is clearly a lot of work to be done but this is a wonderful start.

**Quotes attributable to the Attorney General and Minister for Justice and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, Yvette D’Ath:**

“I am heartened to see how much progress has been made in just eight months.

“This progress is a reflection of the Palaszczuk Government’s commitment to improving our forensic DNA services and restoring the public’s trust in the criminal justice system.

“This investment will provide the necessary capacity to conduct historical reviews of 30,000 cases to determine whether further DNA testing or interpretation may be appropriate.”

**Quotes attributable to Chief Executive Officer of Forensic Services Queensland, Professor Linzi Wilson-Wilde:**

“We have prioritised building a suitably skilled workforce, including a strong leadership team, and implementing processes that will ensure forensic DNA samples are tested to the highest standards.

“The leadership of interim advisory board co-chairs Julie Dick SC and Mr Sofronoff KC has been instrumental in our efforts to overhaul forensic DNA services.

“This additional investment will provide the capacity needed to reduce the time it takes for testing on matters before the courts, and to work through the cases that are identified as requiring retesting.

**ENDS**

## **Q&A – FORENSIC DNA PROGRESS REPORT**

### **How is the Queensland Government tracking in implementing the recommendations made by the final report of the Commission of Inquiry into Forensic DNA Testing in Queensland?**

The Commission of Inquiry's final report made 123 recommendations. Of these, 33 have been completed and a further 57 are underway. This means 73 per cent of all recommendations are either completed or active steps are being taken to implement the recommendation.

To guide implementation, recommendations have been grouped into four focus areas or elements:

1. Organisational reform
2. Culture, quality and innovation
3. Scientific service delivery
4. Historical case review

These elements represent focus areas and do not imply priority in terms of the implementation of recommendations.

### **What are the main recommendations that have been completed?**

The most important recommendation to act on was to cease the practice of using a quantitation threshold, known as the 'DNA insufficient for further processing' threshold, that stopped the further processing of samples.

We also immediately ceased reporting samples as 'No DNA detected' until such time as we had properly validated the true limit of detection. These steps were taken immediately following receipt of the final report's recommendations.

Other key reforms implemented include:

- the establishment of Forensic Science Queensland (FSQ), an interim advisory board and three expert sub-committees to strengthen the quality and scientific integrity of Queensland's forensic biology and forensic chemistry services;
- appointments to key leadership positions within FSQ including Chief Executive Officer Professor Linzi Wilson-Wilde OAM and managers for each of the Innovation, Quality and Biology teams, and the creation of an FSQ leadership group;
- the creation of a Case Review Team to support FSQ in prioritising the review of cases, including liaising with key criminal justice system stakeholders;
- the introduction of a dedicated Quality Team to drive best practice and oversee the process for identification and resolution of quality issues;
- the introduction of a new Innovation Team to establish a strong research function to ensure the laboratory remains contemporary in terms of scientifically valid service delivery;
- updating and validating the contents of new Forensic Medical Examination Kits to replace the previous Sexual Assault Investigation Kits and Just in Case Kits.

## Q&A – FORENSIC DNA PROGRESS REPORT

- agreement between FSQ and the Queensland Police Service regarding the sharing of information within the Forensic Register, including case records, including examination notes, photographs, exhibit records and case management entries; and
- an agreement with the Australian Federal Police (AFP) to conduct bone sample DNA analysis for Queensland at no initial cost.

### **What recommendations are underway?**

A recommendation was made within the final report that sufficient investment to support the implementation of the recommendations would be necessary from the Queensland Government. In response, this Government committed more than \$95 million in December 2022 soon after the final report was released.

A large-scale recruitment drive is underway to source scientists to staff FSQ and help implement recommendations relating to scientific processes.

The remaining recommendations focus on long-term reform and are dependent on legislative reform and progress of other recommendations.

The report also highlights future focus areas including:

- renewing forensic science infrastructure;
- enhancing information technology platforms;
- managing current criminal justice system impacts; and
- strengthening the quality and scientific integrity of forensic services.

### **It has been eight months. Why hasn't the government at least commenced the remaining recommendations?**

Completing or taking active steps toward implementing 73 per cent of the Commissioner's recommendations is excellent progress.

Some of the 33 recommendations yet to be addressed are dependent on legislative reform and the progress of other recommendations.

The initial focus has been on implementing recommendations to establish interim scientific leadership and appropriate organisational structures and arrangements to accommodate the attributes we want in a forensic DNA service – integrity, transparency, accountability and quality.

We have also prioritised building a suitably skilled workforce and implementing processes that will ensure forensic DNA samples are tested to the highest standards. 22 new scientists have been recruited to join FSQ to date, but 10 are still to commence.

These actions are a pre-requisite for the implementation of several other recommendations, particularly those relating to laboratory processes and procedures. This work is aimed at overhauling a critical and complex service. It is important it is done properly and not rushed.

## **Q&A – FORENSIC DNA PROGRESS REPORT**

### **When do you expect all the recommendations to be in place?**

Many recommendations relate to the review of historical cases where a court proceeding had previously concluded or a police investigation was not progressed further. The review of historical DNA samples, in some categories, dates back as far as 2007. This is a substantial undertaking and will take a number of years to complete.

Additionally, other recommendations are contingent on significant infrastructure and technology upgrades which will also take a number of years to complete.

### **When do you expect all historical cases impacted as a result of failings within the forensic DNA laboratory to be reviewed?**

The review of historical DNA samples, in some categories, dates back as far as 2007. This is a substantial undertaking and will take a number of years to complete.

An initial review of cases in line with relevant recommendations made by the Commission of Inquiry estimated that just over 30,000 cases would need to be reviewed. However, this is not a simple number to determine because many of the categories of cases recommended in the COI final report for review overlap with each other – and some cases need to be examined in detail before it is known whether they were impacted by the processes at the time.

A legal-led case review process has now been developed in consultation with criminal justice system stakeholders with subsequent endorsement by the Forensic Justice Advisory Sub-Committee. The legal-led process entails a legal assessment as to whether a sample is, in fact, probative in the case prior to being submitted to FSQ for further scientific advice. This process is being implemented for cases currently before the courts that contain samples previously subjected to sub-optimal testing. A review of historical court matters and police investigations will follow.

### **Do you have enough qualified scientific staff to test samples at the laboratory?**

So far, we have made 33 offers to potential staff, 27 have accepted.

We know we still need more. (TOTAL STAFF OF AROUND 40)

There are enormous challenges recruiting qualified and experienced staff to interpret DNA results, as the pool of suitably qualified scientists is limited nationally and globally. We are doing everything we can to recruit appropriately qualified scientists.

FSQ's leadership team is leading a large-scale recruitment drive to source staff across multiple positions. This includes efforts to attract international applicants.

Some work is being sent to partner agencies interstate and overseas. This will help address backlogs.



## **Q&A – FORENSIC DNA PROGRESS REPORT**

### **What is being done for victim-survivors of crime affected by the laboratory's issues in the meantime?**

I acknowledge the impact the delay in assessing cases will have on the courts, families and other key stakeholders.

However, it is vital that we ensure the forensic DNA evidence is correct and that we are relying on quality scientific evidence to restore key stakeholder and the Queensland public's confidence in our forensic DNA services.

The case review process prepared by FSQ in consultation with key stakeholders will ensure that cases with scheduled court dates are being prioritised for review and any required further testing, analysis and/or interpretation.

The FSQ Interim Advisory Board includes a representative from a victim support organisation to give a voice to victims of crime.

It is recognised that this will be a challenging time for Queenslanders affected by these matters. Anyone who requires support, including concerned victims, can contact the Queensland Police Service hotline on 1300 993 191.

### **What happens if a recommendation is unable to be implemented due to factors like cost and workforce?**

We are confident all recommendations will be implemented; however, we are mindful factors like recruiting appropriately qualified staff can be challenging.

Should circumstances beyond our control prevent us from implementing a recommendation, we will consult with key stakeholders to develop a contingency plan.

We are fortunate to have access to a wealth of expertise including FSQ interim advisory board co-chair Walter Sofronoff KC, who conducted the Commission of Inquiry, as well as internationally renowned forensic scientists on the FSQ interim advisory board and subcommittees.

## TPs – DNA COI Progress Report

- Significant progress has been made on the delivery of recommendations by the Commission of Inquiry into Forensic DNA Testing in Queensland.
- More than 70 per cent of the independent inquiry's recommendations are either underway or completed.
- An additional \$94.5 million will be invested to continue implementation of these important reforms.
- The newly established Forensic Services Queensland headed by eminent scientist Professor Wilson-Wilde, is putting in place appropriate structures to deliver what we want in a forensic DNA service – integrity, transparency, accountability and quality.
- We have prioritised building a suitably skilled workforce, including a strong leadership team, and implementing processes that will ensure forensic DNA samples are tested to the highest standards.
- This additional investment will contribute to renewing forensic science infrastructure; enhancing information technology platforms; managing current criminal justice system impacts; and strengthening the quality and scientific integrity of forensic services.
- It will also provide the necessary capacity to conduct historical reviews of 30,000 cases to determine whether further DNA testing or interpretation may be appropriate.
- I am grateful for everyone who has been working incredibly hard under challenging circumstances to continue providing services that are critical to the health and justice systems.
- Victims of crime can be assured that addressing the issues identified by the Commission of Inquiry are a priority for this government.

## Theresa Stinson

---

**From:** SDLO Irrelevant@health.qld.gov.au>  
**Sent:** Monday, 18 September 2023 9:40 AM  
**To:** Alex Mayfield; Amanda Medew; Amy Goodwin; Amy Louise Melville; Ben Armstrong; Brett Reed; Claire Daly; CLLO; DG correspondence; DL-ELT\_Personal; Estimates; Finn Semple; Hamish Swanson; Jacqueline Quigg; James Farrell; Jess Burns; Julie Shilton-Bevan; Kyle Fogarty; Luke Richmond; Madeline Cunnington; Mark Gibb; Melleesa Cowie; Michael Walsh; Michaela Edwards; Miranda Claughton; Natarjsha Kramer; Nellie Gordon; news; Nick Steele; Olivia Amsden; Phoenix Campbell; Rachel Western; Renaie Tesch; Sabina Mandic; Sally Gannon; Stephanie Thompson; Stephen Stewart; Tracey Walker; Trish Nielsen  
**Subject:** UPDATED HIB - Recent media interest in Forensic Science Queensland  
**Attachments:** UPDATED HIB - Recent media interest in Forensic Science Queensland .docx; UPDATED HIB - Recent media interest in Forensic Science Queensland .pdf; Attachment 1 - Articles published in the Australian - 090923 and 110923.pdf; Attachment 2 - Media articles 170923 and 180923.pdf

Good morning

Following additional media over the weekend, the MO asked for an urgent update of the FSQ HIB this morning. Please find attached.

Kind regards  
Claire



### Claire Daly

Senior Departmental Liaison Officer  
Ministerial and Executive Services, Office of the  
Director-General | Queensland Health

**P** Irrelevant  
**E** [Irrelevant@health.qld.gov.au">Irrelevant@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:<span style=)  
**W** [health.qld.gov.au](http://health.qld.gov.au)  
**A** [Level 37, 1 William Street, Brisbane](#)

Queensland Health acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land across Queensland, and pays respect to First Nations Elders past, present and future.

**QUEENSLAND  
HEALTH VISION**

A world class health system for all Queenslanders



---

**From:** SDLO  
**Sent:** Friday, 15 September 2023 6:12 PM  
**Subject:** UPDATED HIB - Recent media interest in Forensic Science Queensland

Good afternoon

Please find attached a Hot Issues Brief (HIB) that has been updated in relation to recent media interest around Forensic Science Queensland.

Updates are reflected in yellow.

Please note that print and online media articles that are due to be published on or around today, 15 September 2023, to coincide with the release of a further episode of the Shandee's Legacy podcast and will further build on themes and issues in associated media published by The Australian last week.

Regards,  
Alex



**Alex Mayfield**

A/Senior Departmental Liaison Officer  
Ministerial and Executive Services,  
Office of the Director-General | Queensland Health

P Irrelevant  
E Irrelevant @health.qld.gov.au  
W health.qld.gov.au  
A Level 37, 1 William Street, BRISBANE

**QUEENSLAND  
HEALTH VISION**

A world class health system for all Queenslanders



Queensland Health acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land across Queensland, and pays respect to First Nations Elders past, present and future.

**From:** SDLO

**Sent:** Friday, 1 September 2023 6:37 PM

**To:** Alex Mayfield Irrelevant @health.qld.gov.au>; Amanda Medew Irrelevant @ministerial.qld.gov.au>; Amy Goodwin Irrelevant @health.qld.gov.au>; Amy Louise Melville Irrelevant @health.qld.gov.au>; Ben Armstrong Irrelevant @health.qld.gov.au>; Brett Reed Irrelevant @ministerial.qld.gov.au>; Claire Daly Irrelevant @health.qld.gov.au>; CLLO Irrelevant @health.qld.gov.au>; Denise Spokes Irrelevant @health.qld.gov.au>; DG correspondence Irrelevant @health.qld.gov.au>; DL-ELT\_Persona Irrelevant @health.qld.gov.au>; Estimates Irrelevant @health.qld.gov.au>; Finn Semple Irrelevant @ministerial.qld.gov.au>; Hamish Swanson Irrelevant @ministerial.qld.gov.au>; Jacqueline Quigg Irrelevant @ambulance.qld.gov.au>; James Farrell Irrelevant @ministerial.qld.gov.au>; Jess Burns Irrelevant @health.qld.gov.au>; Julie Shilton-Bevan Irrelevant @health.qld.gov.au>; Kyle Fogarty Irrelevant @health.qld.gov.au>; Luke Richmond Irrelevant @ministerial.qld.gov.au>; Madeline Cunnington Irrelevant @ministerial.qld.gov.au>; Mark Gibb Irrelevant @health.qld.gov.au>; Melleesa Cowie Irrelevant @health.qld.gov.au>; Michael Walsh Irrelevant @health.qld.gov.au>; Michaela Edwards Irrelevant @ministerial.qld.gov.au>; Miranda Cloughton Irrelevant @health.qld.gov.au>; Natarjsha Kramer Irrelevant @ministerial.qld.gov.au>; news Irrelevant @health.qld.gov.au>; Nick Steele Irrelevant @health.qld.gov.au>; Olivia Amsden Irrelevant @ministerial.qld.gov.au>; Phoenix Campbell Irrelevant @ministerial.qld.gov.au>; Rachel Western Irrelevant @ministerial.qld.gov.au>; Renaie Tesch Irrelevant @health.qld.gov.au>; Sabina Mandic Irrelevant @health.qld.gov.au>; Sally Gannon Irrelevant @health.qld.gov.au>; Stephen Stewart Irrelevant @health.qld.gov.au>; Tracey Walker Irrelevant @health.qld.gov.au>; Trish Nielsen Irrelevant @health.qld.gov.au>

**Subject:** HIB - Forensic Science Queensland Media interviews

Good evening,

Please find attached a Hot Issues Brief (HIB) prepared by Forensic Science Queensland in relation recent media interviews undertaken by Professor Linzi Wilson-Wilde OAM, Chief Executive Officer, Forensic Science Queensland (FSQ).

The HIB was prepared noting that further media articles may be published post interviews.

Regards,

Sabina



**Sabina Mandic**

A/Principal Briefing and Liaison Officer  
Office of the Director-General and System Strategy  
Division | Queensland Health

P Irrelevant  
E Irrelevant @health.qld.gov.au  
W health.qld.gov.au



Queensland Health acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land across Queensland, and pays respect to First Nations Elders past, present and future.

\*\*\*\*\*

Disclaimer: This email and any attachments may contain legally privileged or confidential information and may be protected by copyright. You must not use or disclose them other than for the purposes for which they were supplied. The privilege or confidentiality attached to this message and attachments is not waived by reason of mistaken delivery to you. If you are not the intended recipient, you must not use, disclose, retain, forward or reproduce this message or any attachments. If you receive this message in error, please notify the sender by return email or telephone and destroy and delete all copies. Unless stated otherwise, this email represents only the views of the sender and not the views of the Queensland Government.

Queensland Health carries out monitoring, scanning and blocking of emails and attachments sent from or to addresses within Queensland Health for the purposes of operating, protecting, maintaining and ensuring appropriate use of its computer network.

\*\*\*\*\*

# Hot Issues Brief

## Recent media interest in Forensic Science Queensland UPDATED 18 September 2023

### Issue

- There has been recent active media interest in Forensic Science Queensland (FSQ).
- Following the recent interviews held between Professor Linzi Wilson-Wilde OAM, Chief Executive Officer of FSQ, and journalists from The Australian, Hedley Thomas and David Murray, further questions have been raised relating to evidence provided to the Commission of Inquiry into Forensic DNA Testing in Queensland ("COI") by Professor Linzi Wilson-Wilde.
- In recent articles that ran in The Australian on 16 and 17 September 2023, Mr Thomas has pursued a personalised narrative that calls into question the integrity of Professor Wilson-Wilde, referencing the expert opinion she provided to the COI, part of which pertained to Project 13.
- Mr Thomas has also published a further episode of the "Shandee's Story" podcast which includes opinion from Dr Kirsty Wright that expresses her concerns that Professor Wilson-Wilde is not up to the task of running the laboratory.
- Mr Thomas has also alleged that through her evidence given to the COI, Professor Wilson-Wilde misled the COI about the impact and importance of the DNA yield aspect of Project 13 and that this misleading evidence led to the COI missing Project 13 as the root cause of the DNA yield issues at the lab that led to the issues in the Shandee Blackburn case.
- The responses provided to Mr Thomas by both Professor Wilson-Wilde and Queensland Health were incorporated into both the print stories and the podcast.
- The article published in The Australian on 18 September 2023 entitled "DNA overhaul: top scientist barred" opines that Dr Kirsty Wright has been "excluded from helping on the reform process" by not being appointed to the advisory board (a paid position) due to the COI recommendation that the board include "two or three eminent forensic scientists from jurisdictions other than Queensland".
- In this article Dr Wright expresses her "shock and confusion" at the COI recommendation regarding Board composition and expressed her opinion that it was done deliberately to exclude her from being on the Board.
- Professor Wilson-Wilde was commissioned during the COI to review extensive documentation associated with contamination events occurring in the laboratory in 2007 and 2008. The contamination events, along with low DNA recovery/yield, were associated with Project 13, which was undertaken in 2007 to support the implementation of a new automated extraction methodology.
- A draft version of the Project 13 report was included in the extensive suite of documents for Professor Wilson-Wilde to review, within a 1-week timeframe, in order to determine the possible cause of the contamination issues and assess the response to the contamination issues.
- Professor Wilson-Wilde provided an expert opinion which outlined major flaws with the project design, content, and outcomes, and noted that the identified flaws were mitigated in subsequent projects that were conducted following the cessation of the fully automated method.

- It should be noted that Professor Wilson-Wilde was highly critical of Project 13 as a validation project and report overall. Her report was focussed on the scope prescribed by the COI (which focussed on the issue of contamination) and was provided within tight time constraints. Additionally, it was anticipated that the expected overhaul of the laboratory's procedures and practices post-COI, in combination with the planned case review process, would further remediate and continue to improve any residual issues.
- Professor Wilson-Wilde is confident that Project 13 issues do not create significant ongoing risks at FSQ given that there is now a new robotic platform in use. A full independent DNA audit of all DNA analysis methods has been conducted and a number of opportunities for improvement has been identified.
- In addition, the extraction methodology is being tested for the purposes of continuous improvement and providing confidence to the FSQ leadership group, and others, that all methods currently in use have been thoroughly assessed. A complete overhaul of all of the DNA analysis processes, including the extraction process is currently underway.
- All documents referred to in the media reports are publicly available on the COI website, including the Project 13 report and Professor Wilson-Wilde's expert opinion about Project 13.

## Background

- Through liaison with the QH media team, Professor Wilson-Wilde previously conducted two media interviews on Thursday 31 August 2023 with journalists from two separate media publications (The Australian and The Courier Mail).
- The four-hour interview with The Australian's Hedley Thomas and David Murray was conducted in the presence of Mr Walter Sofronoff KC and Ms Julie Dick SC, in their capacity as Co-Chairs of the FSQ Interim Advisory Board (and in Mr Sofronoff's capacity as former Commissioner of the Commission of Inquiry into Forensic DNA Testing in Queensland ("COI")).
- A second interview was held between Mr Thomas and Professor Wilson-Wilde on Friday 8 September 2023 to clarify matters raised during the first interview, primarily focussed on Project 13.
- Print and online media articles were subsequently published in The Australian on Saturday 9 September 2023 and Monday 11 September 2023 (see Attachment 1), and a new episode of the Shandee's Legacy podcast was released on 9 September 2023.
- In the media articles and podcast episode, Mr Thomas expressed the view that the low DNA recovery associated with the implementation of Project 13 was the "ground zero" for the failures that impacted the Blackburn testing in 2013. Some critical and inflammatory commentary was also made about the staff who authored the Project 13 report, two of whom still work at FSQ.
- Prior to publication Professor Wilson-Wilde had informed Mr Thomas that this view was not entirely correct—the issues identified in Project 13 were somewhat mitigated in 2009, with further work conducted through Projects 21 and 22 and the validation of a new partly manual, partly automated method, and DNA yield may still have been an issue coupled to other unfortunate errors in the Blackburn samples in 2013—however these points were not addressed in the podcast.
- It is noted that the significant contamination and DNA recovery issues associated with Project 13 were known at the time of implementation, and were raised by

members of the project team, however a decision to implement the method despite these concerns was made.

- Documents indicate that the implementation of Project 13 was directed to occur by the Managing Scientist at the time, Ms Vanessa Ientile, despite concerns raised by scientists, although no formal sign-off can be located. Ms Ientile ceased working for Queensland Health in mid-2008. Mr Thomas and Mr Murray have contacted Ms Ientile directly for comment about Project 13. Ms Ientile has, to date, declined to comment.
- The Project 13 Report abstract contains a statement which appears, on the face of it, to be untrue, namely that the outcomes of the automated extraction method were “comparable” to those of the manual extraction method.
- The issues with contamination required the automated method to be ceased some months after implementation, until the issues were resolved in 2009.
- Whilst the introduction of a manual step in 2008 reduced the yield issue to some degree, and the contamination events were investigated and largely resolved in 2009, a modified automated extraction methodology remained in use until 2016. That method continued to have yield issues.
- No records have yet been located to indicate further work was completed on the issue of DNA yield in Project 13.
- Any cases suspected of being impacted by these issues will be identified and included for assessment and remediation along with other cases being reviewed post-COI.

## Actions to date

- FSQ has responded to requests for interview and media comment and has acknowledged the previous failings at the laboratory.

• **Irrelevant**

## Media response

- A media holding statement is not required.



## Confidential

- Recent case discussions relating to a Coronial matter have resulted in Professor Wilson-Wilde and Dr Duncan Taylor (forensic statistics expert from Forensic Science South Australia) expressing views to the Coroner about the appropriate testing in a case that directly contradicted the views of Dr Kirsty Wright. Dr Wright was present in this meeting and had been engaged by the Coroner previously to advise on the matter.
- Professor Wilson-Wilde spoke to the annual Coroner's Conference in late August about the importance of ensuring that external advice is sought from forensic scientists who hold current competencies and relevant experience in the processes they are advising about, and that external testing is only undertaken by accredited laboratories.
- A proactive positive media release has been made by Minister Fentiman announcing the recently successful FSQ CBRC funding.

## Contact person

Professor Linzi Wilson-Wilde, CEO FSQ, Irrelevant @health.qld.gov.au Irrelevant



09 SEP, 2023

## The catastrophe called Project 13

Weekend Australian, Australia



Page 1 of 3

# The catastrophe called Project 13

## EXCLUSIVE

DAVID MURRAY  
HEDLEY THOMAS

The independent forensic scientist who triggered last year's landmark inquiry into Queensland's DNA lab believes she has found the origins of why samples failed to identify Shandee Blackburn's killer, in a discovery that raises doubts about results in thousands more serious crimes.

A flawed DNA extraction method used in Blackburn's unsolved murder was introduced despite the lab knowing it was catastrophically failing to recover DNA, and may have failed victims of crime and the justice system for nine years, Kirsty Wright has revealed after reviewing documents published by the inquiry.

About 100,000 crime scene samples would have been processed using variations of the automated method, which saved the lab time and was implemented in a period of intense pressure from the courts, government, media and public to deal with testing delays and backlogs, Dr Wright said.

The Australian's investigative podcast Shandee's Story explored the vicious stabbing murder of 23-year-old Blackburn with the help of Dr Wright, exposing serious scientific failures in the lab that were later confirmed and expanded on by retired judge Walter Sofronoff's inquiry.

"The reason you did this podcast was to understand why Shandee's offender was never identified. The answer is Project 13," Dr Wright said.

"This is the very start of it. This decision in 2007, I believe, is the reason why. And it's not just Shandee's case. It's many, many years of cases. It's Shandee's case, multiply that by however many thousand."

Problems with the automated DNA extraction method used for Blackburn's samples were discovered by Dr Wright and two globally respected experts, Jo Veth and Bruce Budowle, only very late in the inquiry.

Dr Wright has since returned to the very beginning of the method, introduced in October 2007. On the DNA inquiry's website, she found a report on Project 13 that tested the automated method on mock samples and recommended its use.

*Continued on Page 5*



**SHANDEE'S  
STORY**

New podcast episode out now



09 SEP, 2023

## The catastrophe called Project 13

Weekend Australian, Australia



Page 2 of 3

# Why Shandee Blackburn's killer is still walking free

Continued from Page 1

The report's abstract or executive summary stated that the results of the automated method were "comparable" to a manual method.

But in the body of the report, the data showed the automated method recovered up to 92 per cent less DNA than the manual method and was 100 times less sensitive.

The new boss of the lab, professor Linzi Wilson-Wilde, agreed with Dr Wright's main contention about Project 13, its catastrophic yield failure and the deeply misleading summary in the report that backed the automated method.

"The entire project wasn't scientifically valid," Professor Wilson-Wilde said.

"There is a significant potential and a real-world outcome that introducing a method with such a significant difference in the yield of DNA that it would have had an impact on the ability to identify and retrieve DNA from crime scene samples."

Dr Wright said she did not think the report was meant to see the light of day, let alone be on the internet for anyone to download.

"It's their own data that shows in 2007, before they introduced this method, they knew that it was failing, and failing astronomically," Dr Wright said.

"There was no way that this method would be able to get DNA from trace samples. It was struggling to get DNA from visible bloodstains and tape lifts. They're all of the things that we saw in Shandee's case.

"I believe that the failure to identify Shandee's murderer can be traced back to Project 13, this deceptive decision that was made in 2007 to knowingly introduce a flawed method that these managers, these senior scientists, knew

would fail. You don't even have to be a scientist, to look at this data, to look at Project 13, and see that this method absolutely should never be used on crime scene evidence. It was a certainty to fail."

Between 2007 and 2016 the lab

made some significant changes to the automated method, including adding a manual step, which would have improved the recovery of DNA, Professor Wilson-Wilde said.

"But to what extent? We don't know exactly. And so what we need to do is review the cases to see whether DNA yield could have been an issue in those cases.

"I believe there will be additional cases that we will also need review in that major crime category.

"Our scope has widened based on our review of Project 13. Thank you for bringing this to my attention from this perspective. If we can solve more crimes, we're doing our job."

Dr Wright said that in 2012-13, it was recovering four times less DNA than another extraction

method used in the lab. "So we know that it was still failing in 2013," she said.

She found no evidence in the vast amount of material published by the inquiry that the yield issue was resolved before the lab stopped using it in 2016.

As soon as the automated extraction method was introduced, it caused serious and major cross-contamination of samples.

One scientist told the inquiry the contamination was a lab's "worst nightmare", and another said she had heard it led to a sexual assault complainant being wrongly questioned about a murder.

Dr Wright says the contamination crisis consumed the lab's time and acted as a smokescreen for the separate, systemic failure to recover DNA.

She said she had been curious to understand how a commercial method that worked exceptionally well internationally had failed in the hands of the Queensland Health lab.

She was astounded to find scientists involved in the project

decided to change critical settings that the manufacturer recommended for the method to work.

"They didn't only change those settings a little bit, they drastically changed two or three key settings, and I believe that's the reason why this method was failing," she said.

Mr Sofronoff KC found that under managing scientist Cathie Allen's leadership the lab prioritised speed of testing, to the detriment of victims of crime who were denied crucial evidence.

The automated method was introduced before Ms Allen—who was suspended and then sacked in May—became managing scientist in July 2008. Previous managing scientist Vanessa Ientile, who is listed as one of the Project 13 report's authors, this week declined to comment.

Another senior scientist listed as an author still works at the lab.

At this stage it is not known if scientists named as co-authors of the report were all across the failure of the automated method, or who wrote the abstract. It may take an inquiry from those with

stronger powers to find answers.

Mr Sofronoff now has an important advisory role, co-chairing a board with former District Court judge Julie Dick that is monitoring the laboratory's work and its policies.

They are there with other members of the board to protect victims of crime, to ensure the public and the government cannot again be lied to or spun by senior scientists entrusted with the critical work of finding incriminating evidence in crime scene DNA samples.

Professor Wilson-Wilde was one of the independent DNA experts who advised the Sofronoff Inquiry, and after its conclusion she was appointed chief executive of Forensic Science Queensland.

Before that, she was Queensland Health's choice when it wanted to do an internal review of the issues raised in Shandee's Story.

The Weekend Australian sat down with the new DNA chief, Mr Sofronoff and former judge Dick at the forensics headquarters

09 SEP, 2023

# The catastrophe called Project 13

Weekend Australian, Australia



in Coopers Plains on Brisbane's southside.

"I don't believe the automated method and the manual method for Project 13 were comparable," Professor Wilson-Wilde said.

"The abstract was clearly contradictory to the body and the results of the project. Why that's the case, I do not know.

"I believe that project was flawed from the beginning. The report was insufficient and not fit for purpose to implement that method in its entirety.

"A change of that magnitude should have required a full validation, a full, in-depth project to study all aspects of the method to identify limitations, to optimise it thoroughly."



**Main picture: Shandee's mother, Vicki Blackburn and sister Shannah Blackburn with Kirsty Wright, centre; Shandee, above;**

LYNDON MECHIESEN

# THE AUSTRALIAN

Monday, September 11, 2023 | Today's Paper | Mind Games

## DNA lab staff 'raised concerns' about flawed method


**EXCLUSIVE**

By **DAVID MURRAY**

NATIONAL CRIME CORRESPONDENT

and **HEDLEY THOMAS**

NATIONAL CHIEF CORRESPONDENT

6:20PM SEPTEMBER 10, 2023 •  1 COMMENT

A flawed DNA extraction method [blamed for the failure to identify the killer](#) of Shandee Blackburn in 2013 was implemented despite scientists raising concerns it was failing.

The new chief of Queensland's DNA lab, Linzi Wilson-Wilde, said former management decided in 2007 that the method could be introduced first and fixed later as pressure mounted over delays and backlogs.

"I believe that there were concerns raised by staff regarding the Project 13 method. The outcome was that Project 13 was implemented, regardless," Professor Wilson-Wilde said.

The comments came after independent [forensic biologist Kirsty Wright's](#) revelations in The Weekend Australian that a scientific report showed the lab knew the method was catastrophically failing to recover DNA from crime scene samples before it was introduced.

Project 13 tested the time-saving method of using robots to extract DNA – rather

than relying on scientists laboriously doing it by hand – on mock samples.

The Project 13 report's abstract or executive summary falsely and misleadingly stated that the results of the automated method were “comparable” to a manual method, and recommended its use.

In the body of the report, data showed the automated method recovered up to 92 per cent less DNA than the manual method and was 100 times less sensitive.

The disturbing discovery was not canvassed in the meticulous and dedicated work of [Walter Sofronoff's landmark inquiry](#) into the lab last year, and raises doubts about results in thousands more criminal cases including murders and sexual assaults

About 100,000 crime scene samples would have been processed using variations of the extraction method between its introduction in October 2007 and the end of its use in 2016, Dr Wright said.

Professor Wilson-Wilde, the newly appointed chief executive of Forensic Science Queensland, agreed the method was introduced before Cathie Allen took over as the laboratory manager.

“I think at the time there was a focus on turnaround times and implementing a robotic platform that had been purchased from government,” Professor Wilson-Wilde said. “My understanding is that the focus was on implementing the method and addressing the issues that were raised afterwards.”

Dr Wright and internationally renowned experts Jo Veth and Bruce Budowle discovered problems with the method in the final days of the Sofronoff inquiry.

It was used on almost all the samples of concern in the investigation into [Blackburn's vicious stabbing murder](#) in Mackay, including one from a fresh pool of blood that returned a result of “no DNA detected”.

A year's worth of data from 2012-13 showed the method was recovering four times less DNA than another extraction method used in the lab at the time, Dr Wright said.

An explanation for the lab's actions might lie in a ministerial taskforce report from October 2005, unearthed by The Australian, which recommended crucial validation of new robotic equipment be rushed through to save time.

The taskforce was formed to look into serious concerns being aired in courts and the media over delays and backlogs in testing crime-scene samples.

Its report noted that half a million dollars had been put aside for the purchase of robotics and the complete automation of processing of samples. The same technology reduced staff from 450 to 110 in the DNA unit of Britain's Forensic Science Service and significantly increased output.

"The purchase of this equipment will not have an immediate effect, due to the time required to validate the instruments, change the practices within the laboratory, and train staff," the report said.

"The validation can take up to 12 months if the process is started anew, however – according to expert sources – can be shortened to four to six weeks by utilising the validation experience of other jurisdictions.

"It is recommended that the Chief Executive Officer of the Institute ensures that, when validating future equipment, the validation work undertaken by other jurisdictions to introduce equipment and/or automation processes is utilised to minimise validation time while maintaining scientific accountability and integrity by 31 October 2005."

Dr Wright told a new episode of the [Shandee's Legacy podcast](#): "I believe that the failure to identify Shandee's murderer can be traced back to Project 13 – this deceptive decision that was made in 2007 to knowingly introduce a flawed method that these managers, these senior scientists, knew would fail."

The automated extraction method used successfully around the world failed in Queensland Health's hands because the lab decided to change critical settings recommended by the manufacturer, she said. Various changes were made to the method between its launch in 2007 to 2016 when it was abandoned, that would have improved DNA yields, "but to what extent, we don't know exactly", Professor Wilson-Wilde said.

**DAVID MURRAY, NATIONAL CRIME CORRESPONDENT**

David Murray is The Australian's National Crime Correspondent. He was previously Crime Editor at The Courier-Mail and prior to that was News Corp's London-based Europe Correspondent. He is behind investigative podc... [Read more](#)



**HEDLEY THOMAS, NATIONAL CHIEF CORRESPONDENT**

Hedley Thomas is The Australian's national chief correspondent, specialising in investigative reporting with an interest in legal issues, the judiciary, corruption and politics. He has won eight Walkley awards in... [Read more](#)



**Topics**

[Shandee's Story](#)

---

TRENDING

---

**Journos not saying it but PM not doing 'Yes' any favours**

By CHRIS MITCHELL



**Guardian rolls out voice to parliament 'fact checks'**

By SOPHIE ELSWORTH



**Hurdles for Yes among Indigenous residents of '67 heartland town**

By CHRISTINE MIDDAP



**Nationals escalate war on wind, solar farms**

By ROSIE LEWIS



**Back-to-earth Premier to dig in and 'absolutely' stay**

By MICHAEL MCKENNA, LYDIA LYNCH



**'Quick and dirty' fear fuels NDIS flashpoint**

By STEPHEN LUNN



---

SPONSORED CONTENT

**Sky's the limit for content creators with Adobe's Firefly**

In Australia, the creator economy has doubled in size in three years. Adobe is meeting the



demands of the digital-first world with new tools.

SPONSORED

## Enjoy your golf trip up north

It's time to pack the clubs and head north to enjoy one of Australia's best golf tournaments.

SPONSORED

16 SEP, 2023

## New lab chief facing tough DNA queries



Weekend Australian, Australia



Page 1 of 2

## CATASTROPHIC FLAW EXPOSED

# New lab chief facing tough DNA queries

**EXCLUSIVE**

DAVID MURRAY  
HEDLEY THOMAS

The new chief of Queensland's strife-torn DNA lab failed in an expert report to detail a catastrophic flaw in an extraction method that has since been blamed for the failure to identify the killer of Shandee Blackburn in 2013.

Linzi Wilson-Wilde reviewed the automated extraction method for retired judge Walter Sofronoff's inquiry into the lab last year, but in her subsequent report she did not mention information that she had come across showing it was having serious problems recovering DNA.

In new issues that weren't canvassed by the inquiry, problems with the method have raised doubts on thousands of test results in criminal cases over nine years, including Blackburn's.

Professor Wilson-Wilde has launched a staunch defence of her report for the inquiry, saying she was engaged to examine a separate issue of the method being responsible for contaminating crime scene samples soon after its introduction in 2007.

"I provided expert opinion evidence to the Forensic DNA Commission of Inquiry in the utmost

of good faith, truthfully, and in accordance with the instructions provided to me by the commissioner," Professor Wilson-Wilde said on Friday.

"I provided my opinion based on my 25 years' experience in forensic science. My instructions from the commissioner directed me to concerns about the cause of, and response to, contamination issues following a DNA extraction method used at the laboratory in around 2008."

A scientific report reviewed by Professor Wilson-Wilde during her work for the inquiry showed that in testing of the automated extraction method, it was recovering 92 per cent less DNA than a manual method.

The abstract or executive summary of the "Project I3" report that Professor Wilson-Wilde reviewed falsely stated that results from the automated method were "comparable" with the manual method and recommended its use.

Professor Wilson-Wilde's inquiry report did not mention these issues and they were not covered in the Sofronoff inquiry.

Forensic biologist Kirsty Wright discovered the Project I3 report and its misleading summary after the end of the inquiry and has expressed alarm at the

Wilson-Wilde expert report.

Investigative podcast Shandee's Story examined the unsolved murder of Blackburn and exposed lab failures that led to the inquiry.

"I don't want to be in this position," Dr Wright said. "After everything with the podcast and the inquiry and the appointment of Linzi, which I was wholeheartedly supportive of, I thought that's it, we can just relax now, it's all fixed."

"Now I'm having real concerns about some of the conclusions that Linzi is drawing and maybe some of her actions."

"As an independent scientist, I feel responsible. I feel responsible for standing up for the victims of crime and the Queensland community, and if I'm seeing something that just does not make sense, that, worse, could risk the

chance of victims finding justice, I need to stand up."

A Queensland Health spokeswoman said the department "stands by Professor Wilson-Wilde, a world-renowned scientist, for her expertise and integrity, and thanks her for her courage and commitment in taking on the role of transforming the lab".

Professor Wilson-Wilde said the inquiry provided her instructions on October 12 last year and



16 SEP, 2023

## New lab chief facing tough DNA queries

Weekend Australian, Australia



Page 2 of 2

she provided her report eight days later. She has acknowledged in interviews with this newspaper that the automated method had a significant potential to impact “the ability to identify and retrieve DNA from crime scene samples”.

She believed problems with recovering DNA persisted in the lab. “My evidence to the commission of inquiry identified that Project 13 was flawed and not consistent with expected good practice,” she said.

“I am dedicated and determined to ensure that the recommendations of the commission of inquiry are fully implemented.

“With the guidance of the interim advisory board co-chaired by Walter Sofronoff KC and Julie Dick SC, my aim is to create a world-leading forensic testing service that will deliver for our criminal justice system and make Queensland proud.

“I refute in the strongest possible terms that my evidence in relation to this matter was misleading to the ... inquiry.”

Professor Wilson-Wilde said that since The Weekend Australian raised the issues around Project 13, she had gleaned more information from one of her staff, a scientist, who was involved in and aware of Project 13 because of his direct connection to it at the time. This scientist did not write the deeply misleading abstract that falsely purported that Project 13’s results were fine, when in fact they represented a catastrophic yield failure, she said.

The scientist at the time raised concerns the method was failing but “Project 13 was implemented regardless” of staff concerns.

“My understanding is the focus was on implementing the method and addressing the issues that were raised afterwards,” she said.



LIAM KIDSTON

Linzi Wilson-Wilde



18 SEP, 2023

## DNA overhaul: top scientist barred

The Australian, Australia



Page 1 of 2

# DNA overhaul: top scientist barred

## EXCLUSIVE

DAVID MURRAY  
HEDLEY THOMAS

The woman who exposed the wrongdoing in Queensland's DNA lab has been excluded from helping on the reform process.

Kirsty Wright called out the lab's failures on The Australian's podcast *Shandee's Story* and was proved spectacularly right in retired judge Walter Sofronoff's subsequent commission of inquiry triggered by her findings.

The independent forensic biologist has since continued through research in her own time to unearth catastrophic problems overlooked by the inquiry's paid

experts and kept secret by the lab's staff, affecting DNA results in thousands more criminal cases than previously thought.

Yet a new advisory board overseeing the lab is underpinned by a recommendation that excludes Dr Wright and all other Queensland scientists from serving on it.

Dr Wright said she was "shocked and confused" at the inquiry's recommendation that the board include two or three eminent forensic scientists "from jurisdictions other than Queensland".

Mr Sofronoff co-chairs the interim board with retired District Court of Queensland judge Julie Dick. "I really did think it was designed to exclude me. That was my first thought - they don't want me on the board," Dr Wright said.

"Why? What have I done wrong to not represent victims of crime and Queenslanders on this independent board?"

When the inquiry report was released, the Palaszczuk government committed to implementing all 123 recommendations.

Health Minister Shannon Fentiman on Sunday said the government had been consulting on legislation that would formally establish the advisory board.

"The draft bill does not include

a requirement for advisory board members to be from jurisdictions other than Queensland," Ms Fentiman said. "Members appointed to the interim board have been appointed based on relevant qualifications, skills, experience, knowledge and standing."

Based on the Gold Coast, Dr Wright works for the Australian Army developing forensic capability for counter-terrorism and national security needs, and as an RAAF reservist squadron leader helps recover and identify fallen soldiers from historic and current conflicts.

She is a visiting fellow with the Genomics Research Centre at the Queensland University of Technology, was involved in the response to the 2002 Bali bombings,

led an international team identifying victims of the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami, was manager of the national DNA database, and was pivotal to identifying the remains of murdered schoolboy Daniel Morcombe.

Dr Wright said she had "absolutely" wanted to serve on the new advisory board, designed to watch over and support the lab and to give scientists a place to report concerns as they arise.

"I wanted to continue to assist in the reform of forensic services in Queensland," she said.

*Shandee's Story* exposed serious, systemic problems in the lab including a failure to recover DNA from samples that should have been rich with it, and unusually high testing thresholds that prevented potentially vital samples from being fully processed.

Further research by Dr Wright has since identified that an automated DNA extraction method may have been failing from 2007 to 2016, casting a cloud over the new chief of the lab, Linzi Wilson-Wilde, and raising doubts about thousands more results in serious crimes.

Professor Wilson-Wilde re-

viewed the extraction method for the Sofronoff inquiry last year, but failed to include in her report evidence she came across showing it was catastrophically failing to recover DNA, *The Weekend Australian* revealed.

She has denied misleading the inquiry, saying she was engaged to look at a separate serious contami-

nation issue, but the inquiry's written instructions asked her to provide advice on the impact of "any deficiency" identified in the extraction method.

Asked why she didn't raise in her report the extraction issue after seeing it, given that the failure to recover DNA was the central issue in Blackburn's case and a clear focus of the inquiry, Professor Wilson-Wilde said: "I wasn't asked to look at a yield issue at all."

Dr Wright said she had not heard anything from Professor Wilson-Wilde about assisting with reforms until the new laboratory chief emailed her late last month, after *The Australian* started investigating the extraction method issues.





18 SEP, 2023

# DNA overhaul: top scientist barred

The Australian, Australia



Page 2 of 2



GLENN HUNT

**Kirsty Wright**



## DNA lab chief Linzi Wilson-Wilde in the spotlight over what she left out of report



[Forensic Science Queensland](#)

[CEO Linzi Wilson-Wilde. Picture: Liam Kidston](#)

- **By [david murray](#)**

National Crime Correspondent

**and [hedley thomas](#)**

National Chief Correspondent

- 12:00AM September 16, 2023

Did the woman who is now the most powerful scientist in Queensland, running a strife-torn lab that was brought to its knees, mislead the commission of inquiry that last year identified a corrupt culture in testing the state's thousands of DNA samples a year?

This is the question that potentially arises out of disturbing new claims about the lab that has the crucial role of providing evidence relied on by police, prosecutors, defence lawyers, judges and, most important, victims of crime.

New allegations by independent forensic biologist [Kirsty Wright in this newspaper](#) have raised doubts about thousands more DNA results in serious crimes than previously thought, casting a cloud over the new chief of the lab, Linzi Wilson-Wilde.

This is research Wright has conducted since retired judge Walter Sofronoff's inquiry ended, and which escaped the attention of the inquiry.

Wright has discovered a flawed DNA extraction method used in the investigation into the vicious stabbing murder of Shandee Blackburn in 2013 was [failing even before its introduction in 2007](#), and may have resulted in crucial evidence being missed in crimes for nine years.

Wright says it's the key flaw that may explain why Blackburn's killer was never identified, and that it's crucial knowledge for solving many other crimes.

It's a blow for Wilson-Wilde because the highly regarded new chief of the lab was engaged last year as an expert by Sofronoff's landmark forensics inquiry to examine the initial use of the automated DNA extraction method, and failed in her report to detail serious problems she now says she was aware of.

Trials of the new method in a misleading verification report examined by Wilson-Wilde had found it was recovering up to 92 per cent less DNA than a manual method, but it was still introduced because of speed efficiencies.

By not including in her report this catastrophic issue, Wilson-Wilde did not raise what Wright says is the most alarming part of the whole lab debacle and the root cause of the failures in the Blackburn investigation.

Wilson-Wilde has several explanations: She was commissioned to look into a separate contamination issue and was focused on that; she thought the problems with the extraction method would have been resolved because of the addition of a manual step; she raised the issue in briefings with lawyers assisting the inquiry; she had a very tight deadline and was under pressure while managing South Australian forensics full time; and she knew other eminent scientists were working on that general issue.

Following is one of the exchanges in recent weeks between this newspaper and Wilson-Wilde, whose recruitment into the top role was widely praised.

Question: "Do you think, though, the inquiry would have expected you to say, 'Hey, there's also this massive yield problem, you might want to start looking at that because it looks pretty serious'?"

Wilson-Wilde: "I wasn't asked to look at a yield issue at all."

Question: "Okay, but isn't that something you'd just want to volunteer anyway? Like, let them know because they don't know what's there until the expert witness tells them?"

Wilson-Wilde: "In my experience, part of that yield issue would have been addressed ... And I already knew that we're looking at DNA yield as an issue. So I wasn't adding anything to the commission of inquiry by raising DNA yield as an issue because they were already looking at it."

These answers raise only more questions for Wright, whose investigations into the lab with The Australian's podcast Shandee's Story led to the Sofronoff inquiry.

Wright is on the record as being fully supportive of Wilson-Wilde when she was appointed but now regretfully holds serious reservations.



[Dr Kirsty Wright and her German Shepherd Ava at Main Beach, Surfers Paradise. Picture: Glenn Hunt](#)

“I was just delighted. I just felt like a weight had been lifted off my shoulders,” Wright recalls of Wilson-Wilde’s recruitment. “And it really does upset me to say this; seeing her failure to disclose this really important information, I now have serious concerns. It raises some extremely serious questions.”

One of the central issues raised by Wright in Shandee’s Story was that crime scene samples were failing to yield DNA profiles when they would have been expected to.

The Sofronoff inquiry engaged two pre-eminent international scientists, Bruce Budowle and Jo Veth, to look into it, along with Wright.

In the final week of the inquiry, just two days before they were to give evidence, Wright, Veth and Budowle stumbled across the possible answer to the DNA testing results in Blackburn’s case.

They discovered that at the time of Blackburn’s murder the lab had serious problems with an automated method of extracting DNA from crime scene samples.

Across a year’s worth of data from the lab’s cases in 2012-13, this method recovered four times less DNA than another method used in the lab, Wright says.

There were obvious implications not just for Blackburn’s case but for many thousands of criminal cases that had relied on variations of the automated method before it was discontinued in 2016. For the Blackburn investigation, the comparatively poor method of DNA extraction was used on 46 samples of concern that featured heavily in the Shandee’s Story podcast.

One of these was from a fresh pool of blood that returned a result of “no DNA detected” when it should have been a rich source of DNA. The same extraction method was used on 12 samples from suspect John Peros’s car that tested presumptively positive to blood and that a police scientific officer labelled as blood, but that later returned results of “no DNA detected”. Peros denies any involvement in the murder.



[Shandee](#)

[Blackburn’s mum Vicki and sister Shannah. Picture: Lyndon Mechielsen](#)

Samples from Blackburn’s clothing and fingernails, and from a “bloodied” knife handed in to police, were also processed using the same extraction method and returned no DNA.

The late discovery of the problems with the extraction method offered an explanation, but the inquiry was on a tight deadline and time had run out.



Sofronoff at that point already had all he needed from other shocking issues to detonate the lab and start afresh.

In his 500-page report, he recommended the lab find out how long the extraction method was performing sub-optimally, and if there could be retesting.

Wright did her own digging and found a disturbing 2008 scientific report. It was on Project 13, the lab's effort to test the automated method before it was introduced the previous year.

Wilson-Wilde examined the Project 13 report last year in her role as an expert witness for the inquiry, when she was asked to look into the extraction method because it was known to have caused cross-contamination of samples.

That cross-contamination resulted in a sexual assault complainant being wrongly questioned over an unrelated murder, according to the evidence of one scientist.

There was no mention in Wilson-Wilde's report to the inquiry that the Project 13 report had a plainly false abstract, or executive summary, that appeared designed to mislead anyone reading it.

The summary stated that tests on the automated method Wilson-Wilde was reviewing delivered results that were "comparable" with a manual method, and recommended its use.



[Shandee](#)

[Blackburn with John Peros, the main suspect who denies any involvement in the murder.](#)

Yet the graphs in the body of the report showed the automated method recovered up to 92 per cent less DNA than the manual method and was 100 times less sensitive.

If Wilson-Wilde did raise any of this with the lawyers assisting Sofronoff, it wasn't mentioned in counsel assisting Susan Hedge's summary at the inquiry of the expert's findings.

"There's no concern about the reliability of results produced by the laboratory in that period," Hedge told the inquiry.

And although Wilson-Wilde was engaged as an expert because of the contamination issues, she was given a broad brief by the inquiry to determine, among other things, whether the testing process "was scientifically sound and conducted in accordance with international best practice".

Wright said: “It’s obvious that the method that they introduced was failing to recover DNA on a very, very large scale. It jumps out very obviously in full graphs.

“Why was the lab failing to get DNA profiles? That was the heart of why the inquiry was set up. And the answer’s in that Project 13.

“So that should have been disclosed to the inquiry as a priority with exclamation marks.

“This was the most important finding, in my opinion, in the whole inquiry and potentially has a huge impact on many thousands of victims.”

Without the discovery, the lab could not have proceeded with appropriate testing in affected cases, Wright said.

“If those samples are simply retested, they’ll fail. You need to work out exactly what’s gone wrong at a molecular level,” she said.

Wilson-Wilde was asked by this newspaper whether she realised at the time of her review for the inquiry that the Project 13 report’s abstract was false and misleading.

“I thought the whole report was flawed. I thought the abstract was flawed, I thought the title was flawed, I thought the empirical study design was flawed,” she replied. “I thought a number of the statements in the report weren’t consistent with the data that was provided in the report.

“The automated method clearly wasn’t comparable to the manual method.”

She had called out the entire project being scientifically invalid, she insisted.

But in her actual report, she does not address the critical yield issue or the false claims in the abstract that she is now calling out. Her report, with its milder observations that verification was insufficient and not consistent with expected good practice, sank almost without trace at the inquiry.

Wright says she was initially hoodwinked by the Project 13 report’s fraudulent summary, and only later read it fully and realised the automated extraction method was failing before it was introduced.

The timesaving method involved using robots to extract DNA, rather than scientists doing it by hand.

It was a godsend for the lab because its political masters had promised to completely eradicate testing delays and backlogs that were generating fierce criticism from the courts and public.

“I believe that the failure to identify Shandee’s murderer can be traced back to Project 13,” Wright says. “You don’t even have to be a scientist, to look at this data, to look at Project 13, and see that this method absolutely should never be used on crime scene evidence. It was a certainty to fail.”

Wright says she has carefully reviewed documents and data published by the inquiry and believes changes to the DNA extraction method after its initial launch had minimal effect.

The method was “still clearly failing”, she says.

“If Dr Bruce Budowle, Jo Veth and myself didn’t pick up the failure of that method in 2013, and we only stumbled across that two days before we provided testimony, that could have severely impacted Shandee’s case,” Wright says.

“It would have meant that her samples wouldn’t have been properly retested, and it meant that even if they were retested, they probably would have failed because no one would have known what had gone wrong with Project 13.

“It may have affected the coronial investigation and I think it very, very likely would have prevented any chance of identifying the offender.”

It’s the first big test for a new advisory board overseeing the lab, chaired by Sofronoff and retired District Court judge and criminal law expert Julie Dick.

In an ABC radio interview in June, Sofronoff said one of the reasons for the board was that DNA was such a difficult subject to understand and “when problems arise there’s nobody that insiders, scientists, can go to”.

Here, an independent scientist, Wright, is raising serious concerns about information that was not canvassed at the inquiry and that directly impacts on the new executive in charge of the lab.

## David Murray



National Crime Correspondent

David Murray is The Australian's National Crime Correspondent. He was previously Crime Editor at The Courier-Mail and prior to that was News Corp's London-based Europe Correspondent. He is behind investigative podc... [Read more](#)

## Hedley Thomas



National Chief Correspondent

Hedley Thomas is The Australian’s national chief correspondent, specialising in investigative reporting with an interest in legal issues, the judiciary, corruption and politics. He has won eight Walkley awards in... [Read more](#)

<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/inquirer/dna-lab-chief-linzi-wilsonwilde-in-the-spotlight-over-what-she-left-out-of-report/news-story/a54ea6e2b845747c7448025c405c789a?btr=b174a2f78573976f18ae0f3b6f24018a>



## Qld DNA lab rebuild continues with \$100m committed, 30 scientists recruited

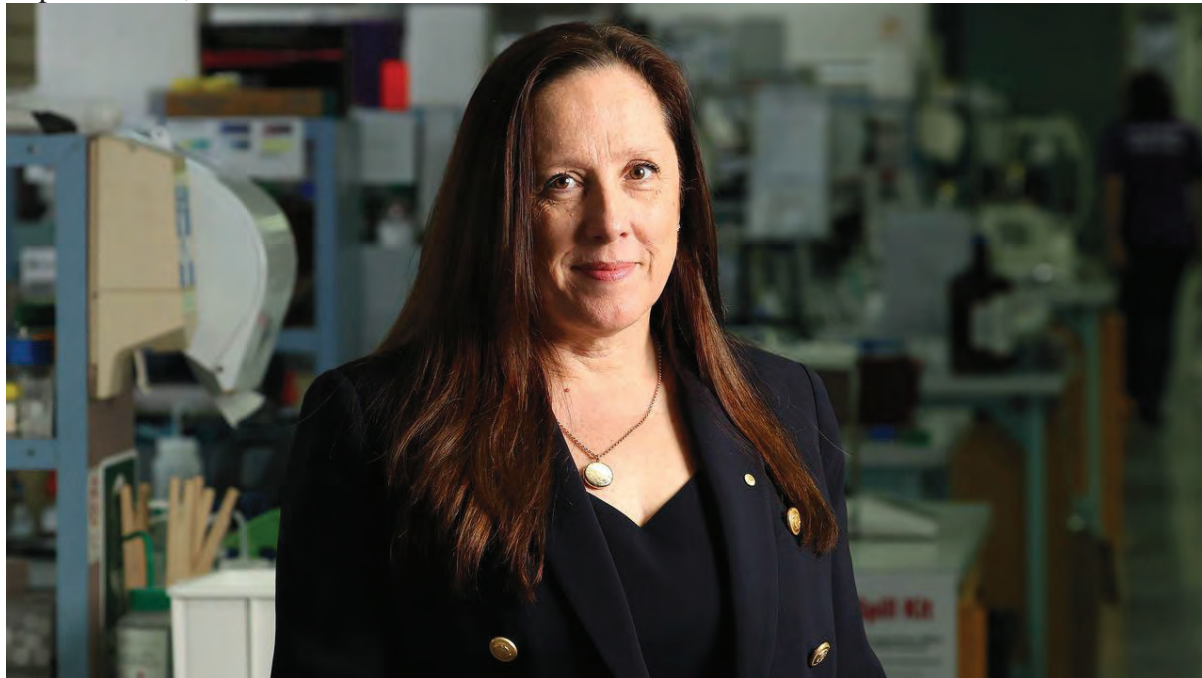
Nearly 30 scientists have been recruited and \$100m in extra funding allocated to rebuild Queensland's scandal-plagued forensic lab.



[James Hall](#) state political reporter

[@James\\_P\\_Hall](#)

September 18, 2023 - 12:00AM



Forensic Science Queensland CEO Linzi Wilson-Wilde. Picture: Liam Kidston

Queensland's forensic lab has recruited nearly 30 scientists to rebuild the scandal-plagued state-run facility as the government commits almost another \$100 million to deliver critical reforms.

The first progress report to track the transformation of the embattled lab in the aftermath of a commission of inquiry reveals more than 70 per cent of the recommendations are either completed or under way.

The state's forensic service was plunged into scandal following revelations the lab had dismissed thousands of DNA samples from crimes including murder and rape based on an extraordinary application of an arbitrary threshold for testing.

A high profile inquiry, led by Walter Sofronoff KC, ordered the review of samples reported as being DNA insufficient, which [The Courier-Mail revealed](#) in June was related to 30,000 cases.

"This investment will provide the necessary capacity to conduct historical reviews of 30,000 cases to determine whether further DNA testing or interpretation may be appropriate," Attorney-General Yvette D'Ath said.

The inquiry's final report, handed down in December, exposed flawed forensic testing procedures that had a devastating impact on the criminal justice system.

All 123 recommendations were accepted by the state government with the latest investment taking the total cost to repair the lab to about \$200m so far.

The progress report, expected to be tabled today, shows the practice of pausing further processing of DNA samples at a certain threshold has ceased.

Other recommendations so far initiated are the establishment of the Forensic Services Queensland with an interim advisory body and expert sub committee, while improved standards have been enacted under the leadership of chief executive Linzi Wilson-Wilde and senior leadership.

The remaining recommendations yet to be implemented include long-term reforms dependent on legislation to be passed in parliament as well as forensic science infrastructure and managing the impacts on the criminal justice system.

Rebuilding the lab also requires support from an extensive recruitment drive, with 27 scientists so far added to the team as Professor Wilson-Wilde says increased funds will help the service tackle the enormous number of samples needing to be tested.

"We have prioritised building a suitably skilled workforce, including a strong leadership team, and implementing processes that will ensure forensic DNA samples are tested to the highest standards," she said.

"This additional investment will provide the capacity needed to reduce the time it takes for testing on matters before the courts and to work through the cases that are identified as requiring retesting."

Health Minister Shannon Fentiman said Queenslanders must have confidence in the justice system.

"We have already seen significant work carried out, including the identification of serious offenders," she said.

"There is clearly a lot of work to be done, but this is a wonderful start."

<https://www.couriermail.com.au/news/queensland/qld-politics/qld-dna-lab-rebuild-continues-with-100m-committed-30-scientists-recruited/news-story/277049875f8ddb98e4f8d547f1d55d58>

# Hot Issues Brief

## Recent media interest in Forensic Science Queensland UPDATED 18 September 2023

### Issue

- There has been recent active media interest in Forensic Science Queensland (FSQ).
- Following the recent interviews held between Professor Linzi Wilson-Wilde OAM, Chief Executive Officer of FSQ, and journalists from The Australian, Hedley Thomas and David Murray, further questions have been raised relating to evidence provided to the Commission of Inquiry into Forensic DNA Testing in Queensland ("COI") by Professor Linzi Wilson-Wilde.
- In recent articles that ran in The Australian on 16 and 17 September 2023, Mr Thomas has pursued a personalised narrative that calls into question the integrity of Professor Wilson-Wilde, referencing the expert opinion she provided to the COI, part of which pertained to Project 13.
- Mr Thomas has also published a further episode of the "Shandee's Story" podcast which includes opinion from Dr Kirsty Wright that expresses her concerns that Professor Wilson-Wilde is not up to the task of running the laboratory.
- Mr Thomas has also alleged that through her evidence given to the COI, Professor Wilson-Wilde misled the COI about the impact and importance of the DNA yield aspect of Project 13 and that this misleading evidence led to the COI missing Project 13 as the root cause of the DNA yield issues at the lab that led to the issues in the Shandee Blackburn case.
- The responses provided to Mr Thomas by both Professor Wilson-Wilde and Queensland Health were incorporated into both the print stories and the podcast.
- The article published in The Australian on 18 September 2023 entitled "DNA overhaul: top scientist barred" opines that Dr Kirsty Wright has been "excluded from helping on the reform process" by not being appointed to the advisory board (a paid position) due to the COI recommendation that the board include "two or three eminent forensic scientists from jurisdictions other than Queensland".
- In this article Dr Wright expresses her "shock and confusion" at the COI recommendation regarding Board composition and expressed her opinion that it was done deliberately to exclude her from being on the Board.
- Professor Wilson-Wilde was commissioned during the COI to review extensive documentation associated with contamination events occurring in the laboratory in 2007 and 2008. The contamination events, along with low DNA recovery/yield, were associated with Project 13, which was undertaken in 2007 to support the implementation of a new automated extraction methodology.
- A draft version of the Project 13 report was included in the extensive suite of documents for Professor Wilson-Wilde to review, within a 1-week timeframe, in order to determine the possible cause of the contamination issues and assess the response to the contamination issues.
- Professor Wilson-Wilde provided an expert opinion which outlined major flaws with the project design, content, and outcomes, and noted that the identified flaws were mitigated in subsequent projects that were conducted following the cessation of the fully automated method.

- It should be noted that Professor Wilson-Wilde was highly critical of Project 13 as a validation project and report overall. Her report was focussed on the scope prescribed by the COI (which focussed on the issue of contamination) and was provided within tight time constraints. Additionally, it was anticipated that the expected overhaul of the laboratory's procedures and practices post-COI, in combination with the planned case review process, would further remediate and continue to improve any residual issues.
- Professor Wilson-Wilde is confident that Project 13 issues do not create significant ongoing risks at FSQ given that there is now a new robotic platform in use. A full independent DNA audit of all DNA analysis methods has been conducted and a number of opportunities for improvement has been identified.
- In addition, the extraction methodology is being tested for the purposes of continuous improvement and providing confidence to the FSQ leadership group, and others, that all methods currently in use have been thoroughly assessed. A complete overhaul of all of the DNA analysis processes, including the extraction process is currently underway.
- All documents referred to in the media reports are publicly available on the COI website, including the Project 13 report and Professor Wilson-Wilde's expert opinion about Project 13.

## Background

- Through liaison with the QH media team, Professor Wilson-Wilde previously conducted two media interviews on Thursday 31 August 2023 with journalists from two separate media publications (The Australian and The Courier Mail).
- The four-hour interview with The Australian's Hedley Thomas and David Murray was conducted in the presence of Mr Walter Sofronoff KC and Ms Julie Dick SC, in their capacity as Co-Chairs of the FSQ Interim Advisory Board (and in Mr Sofronoff's capacity as former Commissioner of the Commission of Inquiry into Forensic DNA Testing in Queensland ("COI")).
- A second interview was held between Mr Thomas and Professor Wilson-Wilde on Friday 8 September 2023 to clarify matters raised during the first interview, primarily focussed on Project 13.
- Print and online media articles were subsequently published in The Australian on Saturday 9 September 2023 and Monday 11 September 2023 (see Attachment 1), and a new episode of the Shandee's Legacy podcast was released on 9 September 2023.
- In the media articles and podcast episode, Mr Thomas expressed the view that the low DNA recovery associated with the implementation of Project 13 was the "ground zero" for the failures that impacted the Blackburn testing in 2013. Some critical and inflammatory commentary was also made about the staff who authored the Project 13 report, two of whom still work at FSQ.
- Prior to publication Professor Wilson-Wilde had informed Mr Thomas that this view was not entirely correct—the issues identified in Project 13 were somewhat mitigated in 2009, with further work conducted through Projects 21 and 22 and the validation of a new partly manual, partly automated method, and DNA yield may still have been an issue coupled to other unfortunate errors in the Blackburn samples in 2013—however these points were not addressed in the podcast.
- It is noted that the significant contamination and DNA recovery issues associated with Project 13 were known at the time of implementation, and were raised by

members of the project team, however a decision to implement the method despite these concerns was made.

- Documents indicate that the implementation of Project 13 was directed to occur by the Managing Scientist at the time, Ms Vanessa Ientile, despite concerns raised by scientists, although no formal sign-off can be located. Ms Ientile ceased working for Queensland Health in mid-2008. Mr Thomas and Mr Murray have contacted Ms Ientile directly for comment about Project 13. Ms Ientile has, to date, declined to comment.
- The Project 13 Report abstract contains a statement which appears, on the face of it, to be untrue, namely that the outcomes of the automated extraction method were “comparable” to those of the manual extraction method.
- The issues with contamination required the automated method to be ceased some months after implementation, until the issues were resolved in 2009.
- Whilst the introduction of a manual step in 2008 reduced the yield issue to some degree, and the contamination events were investigated and largely resolved in 2009, a modified automated extraction methodology remained in use until 2016. That method continued to have yield issues.
- No records have yet been located to indicate further work was completed on the issue of DNA yield in Project 13.
- Any cases suspected of being impacted by these issues will be identified and included for assessment and remediation along with other cases being reviewed post-COI.

## Actions to date

- FSQ has responded to requests for interview and media comment and has acknowledged the previous failings at the laboratory.

• **Irrelevant**

## Media response

- A media holding statement is not required.



## Confidential

- Recent case discussions relating to a Coronial matter have resulted in Professor Wilson-Wilde and Dr Duncan Taylor (forensic statistics expert from Forensic Science South Australia) expressing views to the Coroner about the appropriate testing in a case that directly contradicted the views of Dr Kirsty Wright. Dr Wright was present in this meeting and had been engaged by the Coroner previously to advise on the matter.
- Professor Wilson-Wilde spoke to the annual Coroner's Conference in late August about the importance of ensuring that external advice is sought from forensic scientists who hold current competencies and relevant experience in the processes they are advising about, and that external testing is only undertaken by accredited laboratories.
- A proactive positive media release has been made by Minister Fentiman announcing the recently successful FSQ CBRC funding.

## Contact person

Professor Linzi Wilson-Wilde, CEO FSQ, Irrelevant @health.qld.gov.au Irrelevant

**Theresa Stinson**

---

**From:** Natarjsha Kramer  
**Sent:** Monday, 18 September 2023 12:25 PM  
**To:** Courtney Thompson  
**Cc:** Phoenix Campbell; Rachel Western  
**Subject:** RE: DNA Quarterly Report  
**Attachments:** TPs - DNA COI Progress Report.docx; QAs First Progress Report - Delivery of recommendations Col Forensic DNA Testing (FINAL).docx

---

**From:** Courtney Thompson **Irrelevant** [\\_\\_\\_\\_\\_@ministerial.qld.gov.au](mailto:_____@ministerial.qld.gov.au)  
**Sent:** Monday, September 18, 2023 12:17 PM  
**To:** Natarjsha Kramer **Irrelevant** [\\_\\_\\_\\_\\_@ministerial.qld.gov.au](mailto:_____@ministerial.qld.gov.au); Phoenix Campbell **Irrelevant** [\\_\\_\\_\\_\\_@ministerial.qld.gov.au](mailto:_____@ministerial.qld.gov.au); Rachel Western **Irrelevant** [\\_\\_\\_\\_\\_@ministerial.qld.gov.au](mailto:_____@ministerial.qld.gov.au)  
**Subject:** FW: DNA Quarterly Report

If this is you, let me know!

---

**From:** Courtney Thompson  
**Sent:** Monday, September 18, 2023 12:10 PM  
**To:** Simon Zanatta **Irrelevant** [\\_\\_\\_\\_\\_@ministerial.qld.gov.au](mailto:_____@ministerial.qld.gov.au)  
**Cc:** Cullen Robinson **Irrelevant** [\\_\\_\\_\\_\\_@ministerial.qld.gov.au](mailto:_____@ministerial.qld.gov.au); 'jacob.miley@ministerial.qld.gov.au' **Irrelevant** [\\_\\_\\_\\_\\_@ministerial.qld.gov.au](mailto:_____@ministerial.qld.gov.au)  
**Subject:** DNA Quarterly Report

Hey Simon,

Do you have any talking points/fast facts on the Quarterly Report that you could share? Hoping to incorporate into the Premier's speaking points.

Thanks so much,  
Courtney



**Courtney Thompson**  
Principal Media Advisor (she/her)  
Office of the Hon. Anastacia Palaszczuk MP  
Premier and Minister for the Olympic and Paralympic Games

M **Irrelevant** | E **Irrelevant** [\\_\\_\\_\\_\\_@ministerial.qld.gov.au](mailto:_____@ministerial.qld.gov.au)

---

**Queensland** *Good jobs  
Better services  
Great lifestyle*

## TPs – DNA COI Progress Report

- Significant progress has been made on the delivery of recommendations by the Commission of Inquiry into Forensic DNA Testing in Queensland.
- More than 70 per cent of the independent inquiry's recommendations are either underway or completed.
- An additional \$94.5 million will be invested to continue implementation of these important reforms.
- The newly established Forensic Services Queensland headed by eminent scientist Professor Wilson-Wilde, is putting in place appropriate structures to deliver what we want in a forensic DNA service – integrity, transparency, accountability and quality.
- We have prioritised building a suitably skilled workforce, including a strong leadership team, and implementing processes that will ensure forensic DNA samples are tested to the highest standards.
- This additional investment will contribute to renewing forensic science infrastructure; enhancing information technology platforms; managing current criminal justice system impacts; and strengthening the quality and scientific integrity of forensic services.
- It will also provide the necessary capacity to conduct historical reviews of 30,000 cases to determine whether further DNA testing or interpretation may be appropriate.
- I am grateful for everyone who has been working incredibly hard under challenging circumstances to continue providing services that are critical to the health and justice systems.
- Victims of crime can be assured that addressing the issues identified by the Commission of Inquiry are a priority for this government.

## **Q&A – FORENSIC DNA PROGRESS REPORT**

### **How is the Queensland Government tracking in implementing the recommendations made by the final report of the Commission of Inquiry into Forensic DNA Testing in Queensland?**

The Commission of Inquiry's final report made 123 recommendations. Of these, 33 have been completed and a further 57 are underway. This means 73 per cent of all recommendations are either completed or active steps are being taken to implement the recommendation.

To guide implementation, recommendations have been grouped into four focus areas or elements:

1. Organisational reform
2. Culture, quality and innovation
3. Scientific service delivery
4. Historical case review

These elements represent focus areas and do not imply priority in terms of the implementation of recommendations.

### **What are the main recommendations that have been completed?**

The most important recommendation to act on was to cease the practice of using a quantitation threshold, known as the 'DNA insufficient for further processing' threshold, that stopped the further processing of samples.

We also immediately ceased reporting samples as 'No DNA detected' until such time as we had properly validated the true limit of detection. These steps were taken immediately following receipt of the final report's recommendations.

Other key reforms implemented include:

- the establishment of Forensic Science Queensland (FSQ), an interim advisory board and three expert sub-committees to strengthen the quality and scientific integrity of Queensland's forensic biology and forensic chemistry services;
- appointments to key leadership positions within FSQ including Chief Executive Officer Professor Linzi Wilson-Wilde OAM and managers for each of the Innovation, Quality and Biology teams, and the creation of an FSQ leadership group;
- the creation of a Case Review Team to support FSQ in prioritising the review of cases, including liaising with key criminal justice system stakeholders;
- the introduction of a dedicated Quality Team to drive best practice and oversee the process for identification and resolution of quality issues;
- the introduction of a new Innovation Team to establish a strong research function to ensure the laboratory remains contemporary in terms of scientifically valid service delivery;
- updating and validating the contents of new Forensic Medical Examination Kits to replace the previous Sexual Assault Investigation Kits and Just in Case Kits.

## Q&A – FORENSIC DNA PROGRESS REPORT

- agreement between FSQ and the Queensland Police Service regarding the sharing of information within the Forensic Register, including case records, including examination notes, photographs, exhibit records and case management entries; and
- an agreement with the Australian Federal Police (AFP) to conduct bone sample DNA analysis for Queensland at no initial cost.

### What recommendations are underway?

A recommendation was made within the final report that sufficient investment to support the implementation of the recommendations would be necessary from the Queensland Government. In response, this Government committed more than \$95 million in December 2022 soon after the final report was released.

A large-scale recruitment drive is underway to source scientists to staff FSQ and help implement recommendations relating to scientific processes.

The remaining recommendations focus on long-term reform and are dependent on legislative reform and progress of other recommendations.

The report also highlights future focus areas including:

- renewing forensic science infrastructure;
- enhancing information technology platforms;
- managing current criminal justice system impacts; and
- strengthening the quality and scientific integrity of forensic services.

### It has been eight months. Why hasn't the government at least commenced the remaining recommendations?

Completing or taking active steps toward implementing 73 per cent of the Commissioner's recommendations is excellent progress.

Some of the 33 recommendations yet to be addressed are dependent on legislative reform and the progress of other recommendations.

The initial focus has been on implementing recommendations to establish interim scientific leadership and appropriate organisational structures and arrangements to accommodate the attributes we want in a forensic DNA service – integrity, transparency, accountability and quality.

We have also prioritised building a suitably skilled workforce and implementing processes that will ensure forensic DNA samples are tested to the highest standards. 22 new scientists have been recruited to join FSQ to date, but 10 are still to commence.

These actions are a pre-requisite for the implementation of several other recommendations, particularly those relating to laboratory processes and procedures. This work is aimed at overhauling a critical and complex service. It is important it is done properly and not rushed.

## **Q&A – FORENSIC DNA PROGRESS REPORT**

### **When do you expect all the recommendations to be in place?**

Many recommendations relate to the review of historical cases where a court proceeding had previously concluded or a police investigation was not progressed further. The review of historical DNA samples, in some categories, dates back as far as 2007. This is a substantial undertaking and will take a number of years to complete.

Additionally, other recommendations are contingent on significant infrastructure and technology upgrades which will also take a number of years to complete.

### **When do you expect all historical cases impacted as a result of failings within the forensic DNA laboratory to be reviewed?**

The review of historical DNA samples, in some categories, dates back as far as 2007. This is a substantial undertaking and will take a number of years to complete.

An initial review of cases in line with relevant recommendations made by the Commission of Inquiry estimated that just over 30,000 cases would need to be reviewed. However, this is not a simple number to determine because many of the categories of cases recommended in the COI final report for review overlap with each other – and some cases need to be examined in detail before it is known whether they were impacted by the processes at the time.

A legal-led case review process has now been developed in consultation with criminal justice system stakeholders with subsequent endorsement by the Forensic Justice Advisory Sub-Committee. The legal-led process entails a legal assessment as to whether a sample is, in fact, probative in the case prior to being submitted to FSQ for further scientific advice. This process is being implemented for cases currently before the courts that contain samples previously subjected to sub-optimal testing. A review of historical court matters and police investigations will follow.

### **Do you have enough qualified scientific staff to test samples at the laboratory?**

So far, we have made 33 offers to potential staff, 27 have accepted.

We know we still need more. (TOTAL STAFF OF AROUND 40)

There are enormous challenges recruiting qualified and experienced staff to interpret DNA results, as the pool of suitably qualified scientists is limited nationally and globally. We are doing everything we can to recruit appropriately qualified scientists.

FSQ's leadership team is leading a large-scale recruitment drive to source staff across multiple positions. This includes efforts to attract international applicants.

Some work is being sent to partner agencies interstate and overseas. This will help address backlogs.

## **Q&A – FORENSIC DNA PROGRESS REPORT**

### **What is being done for victim-survivors of crime affected by the laboratory's issues in the meantime?**

I acknowledge the impact the delay in assessing cases will have on the courts, families and other key stakeholders.

However, it is vital that we ensure the forensic DNA evidence is correct and that we are relying on quality scientific evidence to restore key stakeholder and the Queensland public's confidence in our forensic DNA services.

The case review process prepared by FSQ in consultation with key stakeholders will ensure that cases with scheduled court dates are being prioritised for review and any required further testing, analysis and/or interpretation.

The FSQ Interim Advisory Board includes a representative from a victim support organisation to give a voice to victims of crime.

It is recognised that this will be a challenging time for Queenslanders affected by these matters. Anyone who requires support, including concerned victims, can contact the Queensland Police Service hotline on 1300 993 191.

### **What happens if a recommendation is unable to be implemented due to factors like cost and workforce?**

We are confident all recommendations will be implemented; however, we are mindful factors like recruiting appropriately qualified staff can be challenging.

Should circumstances beyond our control prevent us from implementing a recommendation, we will consult with key stakeholders to develop a contingency plan.

We are fortunate to have access to a wealth of expertise including FSQ interim advisory board co-chair Walter Sofronoff KC, who conducted the Commission of Inquiry, as well as internationally renowned forensic scientists on the FSQ interim advisory board and subcommittees.

**Theresa Stinson**

---

**From:** Tracey Walker [Irrelevant@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:Irrelevant@health.qld.gov.au)>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, 20 September 2023 8:01 PM  
**To:** Natarjsha Kramer; Robert Hoge; Linzi Wilson-Wilde; Megan Fairweather; Catherine Scott  
**Subject:** Fwd: Forensic Science Queensland advisory board

Hi

Pls see questions that came in today for QH, the Board and Board's three scientific experts.

Thanks Tracey

Get [Outlook for iOS](#)

---

**From:** Murray, David [Irrelevant@theaustralian.com.au](mailto:Irrelevant@theaustralian.com.au)>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 20, 2023 11:43 am  
**To:** Tracey Walker [Irrelevant@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:Irrelevant@health.qld.gov.au)>  
**Cc:** Thomas, Hedley [Irrelevant@theaustralian.com.au](mailto:Irrelevant@theaustralian.com.au)>  
**Subject:** Forensic Science Queensland advisory board

**This email originated from outside Queensland Health. DO NOT click on any links or open attachments unless you recognise the sender and know the content is safe.**

---

Hi Tracey,

As flagged, the following questions relate to the Forensic Science Queensland advisory board. Responses are requested by 5pm tomorrow (Thursday, September 21) from Queensland Health, the board and the board's three scientific experts, Rebecca Kogios, Niamh Nic Daéid, and Sheila Willis.

1.  
For each of the scientific experts, considering your connections to Forensic Science Queensland chief executive Linzi Wilson-Wilde, can you appropriately consider and investigate any concerns or issues that are raised in connection to Professor Wilson-Wilde? Does the board/Queensland Health agree?
2.  
For each of the scientific experts, considering your connections to Forensic Science Queensland chief executive Linzi Wilson-Wilde, can you be seen to appropriately consider and investigate any concerns or issues that are raised in connection to Professor Wilson-Wilde? Does the board/Queensland Health agree?
3.  
For each of the scientific experts, considering your connections to Forensic Science Queensland chief executive Linzi Wilson-Wilde, could your participation in the board deter people from raising with the board any concerns or issues connected to Professor Wilson-Wilde?
- 4.



Is it appropriate/best practice to have two scientists from the same institute/centre as scientific experts on the board, in this case two people from the Leverhulme Research Centre for Forensic Science at the University of Dundee (and a third person if including honorary fellow Professor Wilson-Wilde)?

5. Could Professor Wilson-Wilde's position as an ex officio member of the board deter people from raising with the board any concerns or issues connected to Professor Wilson-Wilde?

6. When were the scientific experts on the board appointed (please provide dates for each appointment)? Have any conflicts/potential conflicts of interest been declared by the board's scientific experts or Professor Wilson-Wilde, and if so, when?

Thank you for considering these questions. If there's anything you'd like to check, please call me at any time on **Irrelevant**

Regards

This message and its attachments may contain legally privileged or confidential information. It is intended solely for the named addressee. If you are not the addressee indicated in this message or responsible for delivery of the message to the addressee, you may not copy or deliver this message or its attachments to anyone. Rather, you should permanently delete this message and its attachments and kindly notify the sender by reply e-mail. Any content of this message and its attachments which does not relate to the official business of the sending company must be taken not to have been sent or endorsed by that company or any of its related entities. No warranty is made that the e-mail or attachments are free from computer virus or other defect.

\*\*\*\*\*

Disclaimer: This email and any attachments may contain legally privileged or confidential information and may be protected by copyright. You must not use or disclose them other than for the purposes for which they were supplied. The privilege or confidentiality attached to this message and attachments is not waived by reason of mistaken delivery to you. If you are not the intended recipient, you must not use, disclose, retain, forward or reproduce this message or any attachments. If you receive this message in error, please notify the sender by return email or telephone and destroy and delete all copies. Unless stated otherwise, this email represents only the views of the sender and not the views of the Queensland Government.

Queensland Health carries out monitoring, scanning and blocking of emails and attachments sent from or to addresses within Queensland Health for the purposes of operating, protecting, maintaining and ensuring appropriate use of its computer network.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Theresa Stinson

---

**From:** Phoenix Campbell  
**Sent:** Wednesday, 20 September 2023 4:12 PM  
**To:** news; Natarjsha Kramer  
**Subject:** RE: FYI - Nine News enquiry: DNA report

Great, thanks.

### Phoenix Campbell

Media Advisor

Office of the Hon. Shannon Fentiman MP

Minister for Health, Mental Health, and Ambulance Services  
Minister for Women



Queensland  
Government

P: Irrelevant | E: Irrelevant @ministerial.qld.gov.au

---

**From:** news Irrelevant@health.qld.gov.au>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 20, 2023 4:09 PM  
**To:** Phoenix Campbell Irrelevant ministerial.qld.gov.au>; Natarjsha Kramer Irrelevant ministerial.qld.gov.au>  
**Cc:** news Irrelevant@health.qld.gov.au>  
**Subject:** FYI - Nine News enquiry: DNA report

Hi Phoenix and Natarjsha,

We've received an enquiry from Josh Bavas about Project 13 and Linzi's evidence. We've pulled the below response together based on Linzi's response to the Australian.

We'll send this back to Josh and Marlina (who's also enquired) as soon as we get final approval from Linzi.

### Please attribute the below to Linzi Wilson-Wilde, Chief Scientist, Forensic Science Queensland

I provided expert opinion evidence to the Forensic DNA Commission of Inquiry in the utmost of good faith, truthfully, and in accordance with the instructions provided to me by the Commissioner on 12 October 2022. I provided my opinion based on my 25 years' experience in forensic science.

My instructions from the Commissioner directed me to concerns about the cause of, and response to, contamination issues following a DNA extraction method used at the laboratory in around 2008.

My evidence to the Commission of Inquiry identified that Project 13 was flawed and not consistent with expected good practice.

I refute in the strongest possible terms that my evidence in relation to this matter was misleading to the Commission of Inquiry.

I refute in the strongest possible terms any imputation regarding my integrity and independence in providing my expert opinion evidence to the Commission of Inquiry.

I am dedicated and determined to ensure that the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry are fully implemented.

With the guidance of the Interim Advisory Board co-chaired by Walter Sofronoff KC and Julie Dick SC, my aim is to create a world leading forensic testing service that will deliver for our criminal justice system and make Queensland proud.

## Background

The total number of cases that fall within the scope of the case review process is 30,278.

It is estimated that it will take at approximately two to three years to process cases that fall within the scope of the case review process dependant on recruitment.

So far there are 218 cases where DNA has been identified in samples. DNA was not previously identified in these samples.

In four sexual assault cases and one homicide case, suspects have been identified because of the work that the team at the DNA lab are doing.

## ENDS

Cheers,  
Nigel



### Nigel Jacobs

Team Leader - Media  
Strategic Communication  
Branch | Queensland Health

P Irrelevant  
E Irrelevant@health.qld.gov.au  
W health.qld.gov.au  
A Lvl 3, 33 Charlotte St, Brisbane

---

**From:** Josh Bavas Irrelevant@nine.com.au>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, 20 September 2023 12:38 PM  
**To:** news Irrelevant@health.qld.gov.au>  
**Subject:** Nine News enquiry: DNA report

Hi Qld Health Media team

I am working on a story tonight about issues raised by scientist Dr Kirsty Wright about the submission given to the Sofronoff inquiry into the Forensic and Scientific Services lab.

This follows reporting by News Corp and Seven in the past few days.

It focuses on the submission given by Linzi Wilson-Wilde. (attached)

My questions for Qld Health are:

- Should Linzi Wilson-Wilde's evidence have looked more critically at the issues at the centre of Project 13?
- Is it of concern that Professor Wilson Wilde's evidence did not highlight the issues with Project 13?
- Does the Forensic and Scientific Services lab have an update on the time expected to process the cases within its review?
- How many cases have now been identified as needing review?
- What is the status of the use of Project 13 and its related automated processes (ie is it being used)?

My deadline for this is 4pm.

Apologies for the short timeframe.

I'm happy to discuss these questions on background if you need more context.

Many thanks

Josh

Josh Bavas

Journalist



M  
P Irrelevant

T @JoshBavas



The information contained in this e-mail message and any accompanying files is or may be confidential. If you are not the intended recipient, any use, dissemination, reliance, forwarding, printing or copying of this e-mail or any attached files is unauthorised. This e-mail is subject to copyright. No part of it should be reproduced, adapted or communicated without the written consent of the copyright owner. If you have received this e-mail in error please advise the sender immediately by return e-mail or telephone and delete all copies. Nine Group does not guarantee the accuracy or completeness of any information contained in this e-mail or attached files. Internet communications are not secure, therefore Nine Group does not accept legal responsibility for the contents of this message or attached files.

\*\*\*\*\*

Disclaimer: This email and any attachments may contain legally privileged or confidential information and may be protected by copyright. You must not use or disclose them other than for the purposes for which they were supplied. The privilege or confidentiality attached to this message and attachments is not waived by reason of mistaken delivery to you. If you are not the intended recipient, you must not use, disclose, retain, forward or reproduce this message or any attachments. If you receive this message in error, please notify the sender by return email or telephone and destroy and delete all copies. Unless stated otherwise, this email represents only the views of the sender and not the views of the Queensland Government.

Queensland Health carries out monitoring, scanning and blocking of emails and attachments sent from or to addresses within Queensland Health for the purposes of operating, protecting, maintaining and ensuring appropriate use of its computer network.

\*\*\*\*\*

**Theresa Stinson**

---

**From:** Amanda Medew  
**Sent:** Thursday, 21 September 2023 2:16 PM  
**To:** Shannon Fentiman  
**Cc:** Natarjsha Kramer; Olivia Amsden  
**Subject:** RE: Letter to Dr Wright  
**Attachments:** MIN LTR - Letter to Ms Vicki Blackburn.docx

Thanks,

I have also drafted this one for Vicki – it's reiterating what I have sent her in text messages, but think it's important to come from you directly.

Amanda

---

**From:** Shannon Fentiman **Irrelevant** @ministerial.qld.gov.au>  
**Sent:** Thursday, September 21, 2023 2:07 PM  
**To:** Amanda Medew **Irrelevant** @ministerial.qld.gov.au>  
**Cc:** Natarjsha Kramer **Irrelevant** @ministerial.qld.gov.au>; Olivia Amsden **Irrelevant** @ministerial.qld.gov.au>  
**Subject:** Re: Letter to Dr Wright

Yep - good letter

Shannon

On 21 Sep 2023, at 2:00 pm, Amanda Medew **Irrelevant** @ministerial.qld.gov.au> wrote:

Afternoon,

Are you happy for electronic signature to be applied to attached letter inviting Dr Kirsty Wright to meet with you?

Thanks  
Amanda

<image003.png>

**Amanda Medew**

Senior Policy Advisor

**Office of the Hon. Shannon Fentiman MP**

Minister for Health, Mental Health and Ambulance Services

Minister for Women

P **Irrelevant** | E: **Irrelevant** @ministerial.qld.gov.au

<MIN LTR - Letter to Dr Kirsty Wright.docx>

<SC2300541\_DNA\_A4\_Booklet\_Proof.pdf>



Minister for Health, Mental Health and Ambulance  
Services  
Minister for Women

1 William Street Brisbane Qld 4000  
GPO Box 48 Brisbane  
Queensland 4001 Australia  
Telephone +61 7 3035 6100

C-ECTF-23/12095

Vicki Blackburn

Email: Irrelevant

Dear Dr Ms Blackburn,

Thank you for meeting with myself and Attorney General D'Ath on Monday 18 September 2023. And thank-you for your continued advocacy toward improving the effectiveness of Queensland's forensic services, particularly in relation to the testing of DNA.

As you know, Queensland's forensic sciences play a critical role in assisting our courts in the administration of justice to ensure that victims of crime receive the justice that they deserve. I share your passion to ensure that Queensland's forensic services receive the reforms that are necessary following Walter Sofronoff KC's comprehensive report that was delivered as a result of the Commission of Inquiry into forensic DNA testing in Queensland.

I enclose the first progress report, tabled in parliament this week, that outlines the work done in response to the Inquiry. The Queensland Government has made significant inroads into reforming its forensic DNA testing services, with an investment of more than \$180 million to support this important reform.

It is important to me that you have confidence in the progress being made. I note you have been quoted in recent media as having lost confidence and I am committed to restoring that confidence. I am open to arranging a meeting for you with the Forensic Science Queensland Advisory Board, the subcommittees to the Board, the Commission of Inquiry Taskforce withing the Department of Queensland Health and/or the executive of Forensic Science Queensland.

I have arranged for Ms Amanda Medew, Senior Policy Advisor, on telephone Irrelevant or via email at Irrelevant\_ministerial.qld.gov.au to be available to assist you in organising any of these meetings, should you be open to accepting my invitation.

Thank-you again for your advocacy.

Yours sincerely

**Shannon Fentiman MP**  
Minister for Health, Mental Health and Ambulance Services  
Minister for Women  
Member for Waterford

**Theresa Stinson**

---

**From:** Natarjsha Kramer  
**Sent:** Monday, 25 September 2023 3:57 PM  
**To:** Irrelevant @abc.net.au'  
**Cc:** 'Phoenix Campbell'  
**Subject:** RE: ABC MEDIA RESPONSE

Hi Irrelevant,

This minister has responded to claims about this at a presser today – please see attached below. Thanks!

<https://www.dropbox.com/t/Cmzoc43ZBJ12DBHp>

---

**From:** Health Irrelevant@ministerial.qld.gov.au>  
**Sent:** Monday, September 25, 2023 3:51 PM  
**To:** Phoenix Campbell Irrelevant ministerial.qld.gov.au>; Natarjsha Kramer Irrelevant @ministerial.qld.gov.au>; Rachel Western Irrelevant @ministerial.qld.gov.au>  
**Subject:** ABC MEDIA RESPONSE

FYI

---

**From:** Irrelevant relevant @abc.net.au>  
**Sent:** Monday, September 25, 2023 1:53 PM  
**To:** Health Irrelevant@ministerial.qld.gov.au>  
**Cc:** Lillian Watkins Irrelevant @abc.net.au>  
**Subject:** ABC MEDIA RESPONSE

Good afternoon,

I am seeking response to the opposition's call to re-open the commission into the failings of the D-N-A laboratory in Queensland.

It comes after revelations of a flawed D-N-A extraction method being used in Vicki Blackburn's daughter's case despite it being known that testing practices were failing. Vicki Blackburn claims this information was omitted in the initial Commission of Inquiry. She wants all political parties to get behind the call to reopen an investigation to interrogate these most recent findings by Kirsty Wright. Ms Blackburn also said she hasn't heard anything about how it is going to be addressed.

What is the government's response? Could this please be provided by COB.

Thanks,



Irrelevant

P: Irrelevant  
M

---

We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Australians and Traditional Custodians of the lands where we live, learn and work.

Please consider the environment before printing this e-mail.

The information contained in this email and any attachment is confidential and may contain legally privileged or copyright material. It is intended only for the use of the addressee(s). If you are not the intended recipient of this email, you are not permitted to disseminate, distribute or copy this email or any attachments. If you have received this message in error, please notify the sender immediately and delete this email from your system. The ABC does not represent or warrant that this transmission is secure or virus free. Before opening any attachment you should check for viruses. The ABC's liability is limited to resupplying any email and attachments.



**Theresa Stinson**

---

**From:** Natarjsha Kramer  
**Sent:** Monday, 25 September 2023 1:29 PM  
**To:** Phoenix Campbell  
**Subject:** Fwd: Draft talking points for 2pm press conference

Sent from my iPhone

Begin forwarded message:

**From:** Tracey Walker **Irrelevant** health.qld.gov.au>  
**Date:** 25 September 2023 2:00 pm AEST  
**To:** Natarjsha Kramer **Irrelevant** @ministerial.qld.gov.au>, Robert Hoge **Irrelevant** @health.qld.gov.au>  
**Cc:** Aaron Suthers **Irrelevant** @health.qld.gov.au>, Michael Walsh **Irrelevant** @health.qld.gov.au>  
**Subject:** Draft talking points for 2pm press conference

TALKING POINTS

I am pleased to be meeting with Shandee's mum Vicki Blackburn and Dr Kirsty Wright on Wednesday this week (27 September).

I absolutely take on their concerns seriously and have an open mind.

I have also spoken on the phone today with Walter Sofronoff KC, who is currently overseas, and who was the Commissioner leading the Commission of Inquiry into Forensic DNA Testing in Qld.

I have asked Walter for the Board to provide opinion on:

1. Whether any of the information that has come to light from The Australian and Kirsty Wright would change the recommendations of the Inquiry
2. Whether any of the information would change the testing program that FSQ has already committed to undertake back to 2007 and beyond if required.

The Commission of Inquiry recommendations form the base level of work currently being undertaken at FSQ.

The Commission recommendations put the lab back on track but it is just the beginning.

FSQ has gone further than those recommendations and is identifying further opportunities to improve processes at the lab.

We are rebuilding the lab from the ground up in order to make it a world-class laboratory.



**Tracey Walker**

Executive Director

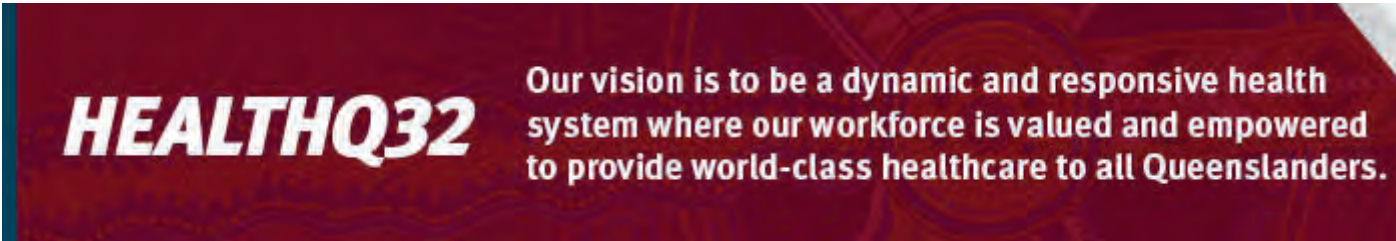
Strategic Communications Branch

Queensland Health

P Irrelevant

E Irrelevant [health.qld.gov.au](mailto:health.qld.gov.au)

W [health.qld.gov.au](mailto:health.qld.gov.au)



Queensland Health acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land across Queensland, and pays respect to First Nations Elders past

\*\*\*\*\*

Disclaimer: This email and any attachments may contain legally privileged or confidential information and may be protected by copyright. You must not use or disclose them other than for the purposes for which they were supplied. The privilege or confidentiality attached to this message and attachments is not waived by reason of mistaken delivery to you. If you are not the intended recipient, you must not use, disclose, retain, forward or reproduce this message or any attachments. If you receive this message in error, please notify the sender by return email or telephone and destroy and delete all copies. Unless stated otherwise, this email represents only the views of the sender and not the views of the Queensland Government.

Queensland Health carries out monitoring, scanning and blocking of emails and attachments sent from or to addresses within Queensland Health for the purposes of operating, protecting, maintaining and ensuring appropriate use of its computer network.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Theresa Stinson

---

**From:** Amanda Medew  
**Sent:** Wednesday, 27 September 2023 12:16 PM  
**To:** Natarjscha Kramer; Phoenix Campbell  
**Subject:** Main points - media release

Minister Fentiman today met with Dr Kirsty Wright regarding concerns she has raised relating to the implementation of the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry into Forensic DNA. Minister Fentiman was joined by the Interim Advisory Board Co-Chair, Walter Sofronoff and representatives of Queensland Health.

The Queensland Government and the Advisory Board take the concerns raised very seriously.

These concerns will be reviewed by the Interim Advisory Board, which includes former Commissioner Walter Sofronoff, former district court judge Julie Dick, three independent forensic scientists, as well as the most senior prosecutors and criminal experts. To ensure full transparency, the Board will call upon additional independent scientific experts to assist in the review of the concerns raised.

The Interim Advisory Board will produce a report on all the issues that have been raised.

The Health Minister has committed to publicly release that report, including the expert advice on which it is based.

Vicky Blackburn quote "I appreciate that this is an appropriate way to review the concerns raised in the first instance. I await the outcome of that review".

It would be premature to comment on the concerns before the review is completed.

### Amanda Medew

Senior Policy Advisor

Office of the Hon. Shannon Fentiman MP

Minister for Health, Mental Health and Ambulance Services  
Minister for Women



Queensland  
Government

**Irrelevant** [ministerial.qld.gov.au](http://ministerial.qld.gov.au)

**Theresa Stinson**

---

**From:** Phoenix Campbell  
**Sent:** Thursday, 28 September 2023 10:14 AM  
**To:** Cullen Robinson; @HealthMedia  
**Subject:** RE: HIB  
**Attachments:** 230928 HIB - DNA (For Prem's).docx

Hi Cullen

Find attached.

Let me know if there's anything you need.

Thanks

**Phoenix Campbell**

Media Advisor

**Office of the Hon. Shannon Fentiman MP**



**Queensland  
Government**

Minister for Health, Mental Health, and Ambulance Services  
Minister for Women

P Irrelevant [ministerial.qld.gov.au](mailto:ministerial.qld.gov.au)

---

**From:** Cullen Robinson [Irrelevant@ministerial.qld.gov.au](mailto:Irrelevant@ministerial.qld.gov.au)>  
**Sent:** Thursday, September 28, 2023 9:53 AM  
**To:** @HealthMedia [Irrelevant@ministerial.qld.gov.au](mailto:Irrelevant@ministerial.qld.gov.au)>  
**Cc:** Jacob Miley [Irrelevant@ministerial.qld.gov.au](mailto:Irrelevant@ministerial.qld.gov.au)>  
**Subject:** HIB

Hi – we're probs standing up today – do you guys have an updated HIB re FSQ – I was off yesterday but have heard the Health Minister had some meetings.

thanks

**Cullen Robinson**

Principal Media Advisor

**Office of the Hon Yvette D'Ath MP**



**Queensland  
Government**

Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence  
Leader of the House

P Irrelevant [@ministerial.qld.gov.au](mailto:@ministerial.qld.gov.au)  
1 William Street, Brisbane Q 4000 GPO Box 48, Brisbane Q 4001

## DNA

The Health Minister has met with Dr Kirsty Wright to discuss concerns she has raised about the Commission of Inquiry into Forensic DNA.

I understand she was joined by the Interim Advisory Board Co-Chair, Walter Sofronoff and representatives of Queensland Health.

We take the concerns raised by Dr Wright very seriously.

The most appropriate course of action is for the independent interim advisory board to review these concerns.

These are internationally renowned experts overseeing these issues.

This advisory board was established in response to the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry to ensure accountability, transparency and strong governance.

The Health Minister has committed to publicly releasing the report that the board will provide.

I want to assure Queenslanders that significant progress has been made in reforming Forensic Science Queensland.

**Theresa Stinson**

---

# Irrelevant

Irrelevant

**Theresa Stinson**

---

**From:** Natarjsha Kramer  
**Sent:** Tuesday, 3 October 2023 9:25 AM  
**To:** Amanda Medew  
**Subject:** RE:

She didn't use his name... they've implicated Bruce. As far as I'm aware she only did one interview?

And this is what was taken from it –

JULIE DICK - 7

"The Commission of Inquiry could only deal with a number of areas."

9

"It is not the case that Forensic Science Queensland is not aware of the issues. They certainly are aware of the issues and when they retest and re-examine, they are aware of these issues."

"There might be areas where the **Commission of Inquiry** did not get in every dark corner, but it would not have made one bit of difference to the recommendations."

---

**From:** Amanda Medew **Irrelevant** @ministerial.qld.gov.au>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, October 3, 2023 9:00 AM  
**To:** Natarjsha Kramer **Irrelevant** ministerial.qld.gov.au>  
**Subject:**

<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/nation/explanation-for-dna-labs-new-chief-discredited-by-evidence/news-story/1282e5620b3541bfaf605212cb7e15a3>

Former judge Julie Dick, who is backing scientist Linzi Wilson-Wilde amid calls for her resignation for having misled the DNA inquiry last year, has told reporters a different scientist who assisted the inquiry had "dealt with the yield issues".

ButThe Australian can reveal that Ms Dick is factually incorrect with her assertions, which have implicated Dr Bruce Budowle, the world's most respected forensic DNA scientist, in the scandal.

Ms Dick and the former judge who led the [DNA inquiry last year](#), Walter Sofronoff KC, have been appointed by Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk as co-chairs of a high-powered board overseeing a suite of major reforms and the injection of almost \$200m into the DNA lab in a bid to reverse years of costly failure.



**Amanda Medew**

Senior Policy Advisor

**Office of the Hon. Shannon Fentiman MP**

Minister for Health, Mental Health and Ambulance Services

Minister for Women



**Queensland**  
Government

P Irrelevant @ministerial.qld.gov.au

**Theresa Stinson**

---

**From:** news [Irrelevant@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:news Irrelevant@health.qld.gov.au)>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, 4 October 2023 2:47 PM  
**To:** Natarjsa Kramer; Rachel Western; Phoenix Campbell  
**Cc:** news  
**Subject:** MR - New DNA Commission of Inquiry  
**Attachments:** XX1023 MIN MR - New DNA Commission of Inquiry v2.docx

Hi Nat,

Unapproved version attached.

Cheers,  
Damon

\*\*\*\*\*

Disclaimer: This email and any attachments may contain legally privileged or confidential information and may be protected by copyright. You must not use or disclose them other than for the purposes for which they were supplied. The privilege or confidentiality attached to this message and attachments is not waived by reason of mistaken delivery to you. If you are not the intended recipient, you must not use, disclose, retain, forward or reproduce this message or any attachments. If you receive this message in error, please notify the sender by return email or telephone and destroy and delete all copies. Unless stated otherwise, this email represents only the views of the sender and not the views of the Queensland Government.

Queensland Health carries out monitoring, scanning and blocking of emails and attachments sent from or to addresses within Queensland Health for the purposes of operating, protecting, maintaining and ensuring appropriate use of its computer network.

\*\*\*\*\*

### **New Commission of Inquiry into forensic DNA testing announced**

- New independent Commission of Inquiry into Forensic DNA testing announced
- Inquiry will be led by retired Federal Court Judge Dr Annabelle Bennett AC SC and will address issues raised since the 2022 Commission of Inquiry
- This includes further investigating claims raised about automated DNA extraction methods as they relate to a process known as 'Project 13'.

The Queensland Government has announced a new independent Commission of Inquiry into Forensic DNA testing in Queensland.

Led by xxxxxxxx, the Inquiry will examine issues raised following the conclusion of 2022's inquiry and its delivery of recommendations.

Commented [DG1]: To be confirmed

The Inquiry's terms of reference include reviewing recent public statements and other documents in relation to automated DNA extraction methods introduced under what is known as Project 13 and whether the recommendations from the previous Inquiry are sufficient to address this matter.

The Commissioner will be able to interview any, or all, experts whose advice about DNA extraction methods as they relate to Project 13 helped inform the initial Commission of Inquiry's findings and recommendations.

The Commissioner's final report and recommendations will be completed by 17 November 2023.

Forensic Science Queensland has already committed to reviewing serious crime cases and associated samples back to 2007, with the flexibility to go further back if required.

A retrospective review of the automated method of DNA extraction, introduced in 2007 and processed by the MultiProbe II instrument, was also a recommendation in the 2022 Commission of Inquiry, and includes samples affected under Project 13.

Approximately 7,000 additional serious crime and sexual assault cases will be reviewed as a result of insufficient automated DNA extraction methods, bringing the total number of cases to be reviewed to about 37,000.

#### **Quotes attributable to the Minister for Health, Mental Health Shannon Fentiman:**

"Concerns have been brought to my attention since the 2022 Commission of Inquiry that relate to the automated DNA extraction method that was introduced in October 2007, under what is known as Project 13.

"The original Commission of Inquiry already recommended a number of reviews of DNA processes and sample cohorts, which the Queensland Government supports.

"This new inquiry will ensure a transparent and comprehensive review of matters raised after the original inquiry and is in line with the Queensland Government's commitment to rebuilding the state's forensic and DNA testing processes.

"It is why the Queensland Government is investing almost \$200 million to support the implementation of all 123 recommendations from the 2022 inquiry.

"I look forward to receiving XXXXX's final report and recommendations in November."

**ENDS**

**Theresa Stinson**

---

**From:** Phoenix Campbell  
**Sent:** Wednesday, 4 October 2023 3:37 PM  
**To:** Natarjsha Kramer  
**Subject:** FW: Draft Media Release  
**Attachments:** 231004 DRAFT MR - New DNA Commission of Inquiry v3.pdf

Sorry, forgot to copy you in.

**Phoenix Campbell**

Media Advisor

Office of the Hon. Shannon Fentiman MP

Minister for Health, Mental Health, and Ambulance Services  
Minister for Women



**Queensland**  
Government

P Irrelevant

[ministerial.qld.gov.au](http://ministerial.qld.gov.au)

---

**From:** Phoenix Campbell

**Sent:** Wednesday, October 4, 2023 3:26 PM

**To:** Irrelevant theaustralian.com.au' <murrayd@theaustralian.com.au>; Irrelevant theaustralian.com.au'

Irrelevant theaustralian.com.au>

**Subject:** Draft Media Release

Hi David and Michael

I understand Nat is touching base with you regarding this. Find attached current draft of the media release for tomorrow's announcement.

We will let you know ASAP if there are any further changes.

Thanks

**Phoenix Campbell**

Media Advisor

Office of the Hon. Shannon Fentiman MP

Minister for Health, Mental Health, and Ambulance Services  
Minister for Women



**Queensland**  
Government

P Irrelevant

[ministerial.qld.gov.au](http://ministerial.qld.gov.au)

### **New Commission of Inquiry into forensic DNA testing announced**

- New independent Commission of Inquiry into Forensic DNA testing announced
- Inquiry will be led by retired Federal Court Judge Dr Annabelle Bennett AC SC and will address issues raised publicly since the 2022 Commission of Inquiry
- This includes further investigating claims raised about automated DNA extraction methods as they relate to a process known as 'Project 13'.

The Palaszczuk Government has announced a new independent Commission of Inquiry into Forensic DNA testing in Queensland.

Led by Dr Annabelle Bennett AC, the new Inquiry will examine concerns regarding Project 13 that have been raised following the conclusion of last year's Inquiry.

Dr Bennett is a retired Judge of the Federal Court of Australia, the former president of the Australian Academy of Forensic Sciences, and was appointed as the Commissioner for the National Natural Disaster Arrangements Inquiry.

The Inquiry's terms of reference include reviewing recent public statements and other documents in relation to automated DNA extraction methods introduced under what is known as Project 13 and whether the recommendations from the previous Inquiry are sufficient to address this matter.

The Commissioner will be able to interview any, or all, experts whose advice about DNA extraction methods as they relate to Project 13 helped inform the initial Commission of Inquiry's findings and recommendations.

The Commissioner's final report and recommendations will be completed by 17 November 2023.

Forensic Science Queensland has already committed to reviewing serious crime cases and associated samples back to 2007, with the flexibility to go further back if required.

A retrospective review of the automated method of DNA extraction, introduced in 2007 and processed by the MultiProbe II instrument, was also a recommendation in the 2022 Commission of Inquiry, and includes samples affected under Project 13.

Significant progress has been made so far on the delivery of recommendations from last year's Commission of Inquiry, with 33 recommendations having been completed and a further 57 being underway – equating to 73% of all recommendations.

The Government has committed almost \$200 million so far towards implementing these recommendations.

The progress so far has resulted in justice for victims of crime in Queensland, with new convictions achieved for sexual assault cases and one homicide conviction.

Approximately 7,000 additional serious crime and sexual assault cases will be reviewed as a result of insufficient automated DNA extraction methods, bringing the total number of cases to be reviewed to about 37,000.

**Quotes attributable to the Minister for Health, Mental Health Shannon Fentiman:**

“Concerns have been brought to my attention since the 2022 Commission of Inquiry that relate to the automated DNA extraction method that was introduced in October 2007, under what is known as Project 13.

“The original Commission of Inquiry already recommended a number of reviews of DNA processes and sample cohorts, which the Queensland Government supports.

“This new inquiry will ensure a transparent and comprehensive review of matters raised after the original inquiry and is in line with the Queensland Government’s commitment to rebuilding the state’s forensic and DNA testing processes.

“It is why the Queensland Government is investing almost \$200 million to support the implementation of all 123 recommendations from the 2022 inquiry.

“We have already seen some very promising results since last year’s Inquiry, and this second Inquiry looking specifically at Project 13 will ensure that the public can have full confidence in our state’s forensic services.”

“I look forward to receiving Dr Annabelle Bennett AC’s final report and recommendations in November.”

**ENDS**

**Theresa Stinson**

---

**From:** news Irrelevant@health.qld.gov.au >  
**Sent:** Wednesday, 4 October 2023 3:01 PM  
**To:** Natarjsa Kramer; Rachel Western; Phoenix Campbell  
**Cc:** news  
**Subject:** Media pack - New Commission of Inquiry into forensic DNA testing  
**Attachments:** Talking Points - New DNA Commission of Inquiry v3.docx; XX1023 MIN MR - New DNA Commission of Inquiry v2.docx; QAs - New Col forensic DNA testing in Queensland v2.docx

These are approved now. Just waiting on the Commissioner role to be finalised.

Cheers,  
Damon



**Media Team**

Strategic Communication Branch | Queensland  
Health

**P** Irrelevant  
**E** Irrelevant [health.qld.gov.au](mailto:Irrelevant@health.qld.gov.au)  
**W** [health.qld.gov.au](http://health.qld.gov.au)  
**A** [33 Charlotte St, Brisbane](http://33 Charlotte St, Brisbane)

\*\*\*\*\*

Disclaimer: This email and any attachments may contain legally privileged or confidential information and may be protected by copyright. You must not use or disclose them other than for the purposes for which they were supplied. The privilege or confidentiality attached to this message and attachments is not waived by reason of mistaken delivery to you. If you are not the intended recipient, you must not use, disclose, retain, forward or reproduce this message or any attachments. If you receive this message in error, please notify the sender by return email or telephone and destroy and delete all copies. Unless stated otherwise, this email represents only the views of the sender and not the views of the Queensland Government.

Queensland Health carries out monitoring, scanning and blocking of emails and attachments sent from or to addresses within Queensland Health for the purposes of operating, protecting, maintaining and ensuring appropriate use of its computer network.

\*\*\*\*\*



### Q&As – New Commission of Inquiry into Forensic DNA Testing

#### **There has already been a Commission of Inquiry into forensic DNA testing. Why is there a need for another one?**

Concerns have been brought to my attention since the 2022 Commission of Inquiry that relate to the automated DNA extraction method that was introduced in October 2007, under what is known as Project 13.

We are committed to reassessing all serious crime cases since October 2007 and while Inquiry Recommendation 105 already recommends a retrospective review of the automated method, the objective of this new inquiry is to further investigate these matters.

#### **Is this a knee-jerk reaction to media coverage?**

No. We believe it is important that the allegations made about the Inquiry are examined independently.

#### **What will the new inquiry examine?**

The Commissioner will undertake an open and independent inquiry to further examine the automated DNA extraction method introduced in October 2007 under Project 13.

The Inquiry's Terms of Reference include:

- a review of recent public statements and other documents in relation to Project 13
- whether the recommendations from the 2022 inquiry are sufficient to address the matters raised and
- When undertaking the above inquiries, the Commissioner will be able to interview any, or all, experts who provided advice in relation to Project 13 in the 2022 Commission of Inquiry.

#### **Will it look at whether Forensic Science Queensland CEO Linzi Wilson-Wilde misled the inquiry?**

The Inquiry can interview any experts who provided expert advice to the 2022 Commission of Inquiry. It is for the Commissioner to determine what will be looked into and the manner in which those inquiries will be performed.

#### **When will the Inquiry begin and end?**

The Inquiry will begin on 5 October 2023. The Commissioner will deliver a final report by 17 November 2023.

#### **Who is leading the Inquiry?**

The Commission will be led by XXXXX.

Commented [DG1]: To be confirmed

#### **Why isn't Walter Sofronoff KC involved?**

The new Commission will be completely independent of the first one and Walter Sofronoff KC is busy with Julie Dick SC chairing the reforms necessary as a result of the 2022 Commission of Inquiry.

#### **Does this mean the former COI failed?**

Not at all. As a result of the initial Inquiry, Queensland's forensic DNA testing system is undergoing major reform. Excellent progress is being made to renew our forensic science infrastructure; enhance information technology platforms; manage current criminal justice system impacts; and strengthen the quality and scientific integrity of forensic services.

**Do you think Walter Sofronoff was misled?**

The information and advice provided to the original Commission of Inquiry will be matters for the new Commissioner to explore.

**Do you have confidence in Linzi?**

Professor Linzi Wilson-Wilde OAM has done a remarkable job of leading Forensic Science Queensland in strengthening the quality and scientific integrity of forensic DNA and chemistry services within Queensland.

I stand by Professor Wilson-Wilde, a world-renowned scientist, for her expertise and integrity, and her courage and commitment in taking on the role of transforming forensic DNA and chemistry services.

Under Professor Wilson-Wilde's leadership, FSQ has started work on, or completed, more than 70 per cent of the recommendations stemming from the initial Commission of Inquiry.

**Will Linzi be stood aside while the COI is under way?**

No. Professor Wilson-Wilde will continue leading FSQ and reforming the state's forensic DNA testing services.

**What effect will this have on the operations of the lab?**

The FSQ laboratory will continue operating as normal.

**How much testing has the lab done regarding the backlog of cases?**

To date, the lab has tested DNA samples in around 200 cases that had been reviewed as a result of the initial Inquiry.

**How many cases are there in the backlog to be reviewed?**

As part of recommendations from the 2022 inquiry, FSQ was already reviewing whether automated DNA extraction methods were insufficient and for what period of time.

FSQ identified the need to review cases back to October 2007, with the flexibility to go further back if required.

Approximately 7000 additional serious crime and sexual assault cases will be reviewed as a result of insufficient automated DNA extraction methods, bringing the total number of cases to be reviewed to about 37,000.

**Will you go back further with retesting if required?**

We are reviewing serious crime cases and samples back to 2007 and will go back further with serious cases if required.

**Have you spoken with Vicki Blackburn and Kirsty Wright?**

For the MO to respond.

**What will happen with the interim board?**

The interim board will continue overseeing work to reform Queensland's forensic DNA testing system.

**How will any conflict of interest around ties between expert scientists and Professor Wilson-Wilde be handled?**

Professor Wilson-Wilde will not be involved in the new Inquiry however any close ties between her and participating scientists will be declared.

**What is happening with the other scientists who are still at the lab who were involved with Project 13?**

Scientists who were working in the lab at the time Project 13 occurred may be asked to provide evidence but who is called, and what information is sought, is solely a matter for the Commissioner.

### **New Commission of Inquiry into forensic DNA testing announced**

- New independent Commission of Inquiry into Forensic DNA testing announced
- Inquiry will be led by retired Federal Court Judge Dr Annabelle Bennett AC SC and will address issues raised since the 2022 Commission of Inquiry
- This includes further investigating claims raised about automated DNA extraction methods as they relate to a process known as 'Project 13'.

The Queensland Government has announced a new independent Commission of Inquiry into Forensic DNA testing in Queensland.

Led by xxxxxxxx, the Inquiry will examine issues raised following the conclusion of 2022's inquiry and its delivery of recommendations.

Commented [DG1]: To be confirmed

The Inquiry's terms of reference include reviewing recent public statements and other documents in relation to automated DNA extraction methods introduced under what is known as Project 13 and whether the recommendations from the previous Inquiry are sufficient to address this matter.

The Commissioner will be able to interview any, or all, experts whose advice about DNA extraction methods as they relate to Project 13 helped inform the initial Commission of Inquiry's findings and recommendations.

The Commissioner's final report and recommendations will be completed by 17 November 2023.

Forensic Science Queensland has already committed to reviewing serious crime cases and associated samples back to 2007, with the flexibility to go further back if required.

A retrospective review of the automated method of DNA extraction, introduced in 2007 and processed by the MultiProbe II instrument, was also a recommendation in the 2022 Commission of Inquiry, and includes samples affected under Project 13.

Approximately 7,000 additional serious crime and sexual assault cases will be reviewed as a result of insufficient automated DNA extraction methods, bringing the total number of cases to be reviewed to about 37,000.

#### **Quotes attributable to the Minister for Health, Mental Health Shannon Fentiman:**

"Concerns have been brought to my attention since the 2022 Commission of Inquiry that relate to the automated DNA extraction method that was introduced in October 2007, under what is known as Project 13.

"The original Commission of Inquiry already recommended a number of reviews of DNA processes and sample cohorts, which the Queensland Government supports.

"This new inquiry will ensure a transparent and comprehensive review of matters raised after the original inquiry and is in line with the Queensland Government's commitment to rebuilding the state's forensic and DNA testing processes.

"It is why the Queensland Government is investing almost \$200 million to support the implementation of all 123 recommendations from the 2022 inquiry.

"I look forward to receiving XXXXXX's final report and recommendations in November."

**ENDS**

## New DNA Commission of Inquiry | XX October 2023

- The Queensland Government is committed to building a world-class forensic and DNA testing service.
- It is why I am today announcing a new independent Commission of Inquiry into forensic and DNA testing in Queensland.
- Led by xxxxxxxx, the Inquiry will examine issues raised following the conclusion of 2022's inquiry.
- The Inquiry's terms of reference include:
  - reviewing recent public statements and other documents in relation to automated DNA extraction methods introduced under what is known as Project 13
  - whether the recommendations from the previous inquiry are sufficient to address that matter and
  - an ability for the Commissioner to call any, or all, experts who provided evidence as part of the 2022 Commission of Inquiry, as their evidence may relate to Project 13.
- The Commissioner's final report and recommendations will be completed by 17 November 2023
- Concerns have been brought to my attention since the 2022 Commission of Inquiry in relation to the automated DNA extraction method introduced in 2007.
- That is why it is appropriate to establish a new Commission of Inquiry.
- It will examine these issues in a transparent and comprehensive manner.
- This approach is consistent with the Queensland Government's firm commitment to rebuilding the state's forensic and DNA testing processes.
- It is why we are investing almost \$200 million to reform forensic and DNA testing, including implementing all 123 recommendations from the 2022 inquiry.
- Forensic Science Queensland has already committed to reviewing serious crime cases and samples back to 2007.
- It is important to note that a retrospective review of the automated method of DNA extraction, introduced in 2007 and processed by the MultiProbe II instrument, was also a recommendation in the 2022 Commission of Inquiry, and includes samples affected under Project 13.
- Specifically Recommendation 105 is as follows:

*The laboratory should conduct a retrospective review of positive control extraction batches processed by the MultiProbe® II instrument to determine if this extraction method was performing sub-optimally, and if so, the period of time in which a sub-optimal method was used and whether there is utility in retesting or re-analysing any potentially affected samples.*

- Approximately 7000 additional serious crime and sexual assault cases will be reviewed as a result of insufficient automated DNA extraction methods, bringing the total number of cases to be reviewed to about 37,000.
- I look forward to receiving xxxxxx's final report on 17 November.
- Thank you.

## Theresa Stinson

---

**From:** Natarjsha Kramer  
**Sent:** Wednesday, 4 October 2023 4:39 PM  
**To:** Chris Taylor  
**Cc:** 'Phoenix Campbell'  
**Subject:** MR - COI  
**Attachments:** 231004 MR - New DNA Commission of Inquiry v4.docx

Hey,

Please see attached the Media Release for the Commission of Inquiry – not the final.

### Natarjsha Kramer

Principal Media Advisor

#### Office of the Hon. Shannon Fentiman MP

Minister for Health, Mental Health and Ambulance Services

Minister for Women



**Queensland**  
Government

P **Irrelevant** E: **Irrelevant** [ministerial.qld.gov.au](mailto:ministerial.qld.gov.au)





## Media release

Minister for Health, Mental Health, and Ambulance Services and Minister for Women  
The Honourable Shannon Fentiman MP

### **New Commission of Inquiry to examine DNA Project 13 Concerns**

- New independent Commission of Inquiry into Forensic DNA testing announced
- Inquiry will be led by retired Federal Court Judge Dr Annabelle Bennett AC SC and will address issues raised publicly since the 2022 Commission of Inquiry
- This includes further investigating claims raised about automated DNA extraction methods as they relate to a process known as 'Project 13'.

The Palaszczuk Government has announced a new independent Commission of Inquiry into Forensic DNA testing in Queensland.

Led by Dr Annabelle Bennett AC, the new Inquiry will examine concerns regarding Project 13 that have been raised following the conclusion of last year's Inquiry.

Dr Bennett is a retired Judge of the Federal Court of Australia, the former president of the Australian Academy of Forensic Sciences, and was appointed as the Commissioner for the National Natural Disaster Arrangements Inquiry.

The Inquiry's terms of reference include reviewing recent public statements and other documents in relation to automated DNA extraction methods introduced under what is known as Project 13 and whether the recommendations from the previous Inquiry are sufficient to address this matter.

The Commissioner will be able to interview any, or all, experts whose advice about DNA extraction methods as they relate to Project 13 helped inform the initial Commission of Inquiry's findings and recommendations.

The Commissioner's final report and recommendations will be completed by 17 November 2023.

Forensic Science Queensland has already committed to reviewing serious crime cases and associated samples back to 2007, with the flexibility to go further back if required.

A retrospective review of the automated method of DNA extraction, introduced in 2007 and processed by the MultiProbe II instrument, was also a recommendation in the 2022 Commission of Inquiry, and includes samples affected under Project 13.

Significant progress has been made so far on the delivery of recommendations from last year's Commission of Inquiry, with 34 recommendations having been completed and a further 68 being underway – equating to almost % of all recommendations.

The Government has committed almost \$200 million so far towards implementing these recommendations.

The progress so far has resulted in justice for victims of crime in Queensland, with new convictions achieved for sexual assault cases and one homicide conviction.

Approximately 7,000 additional serious crime and sexual assault cases will be reviewed as a result of insufficient automated DNA extraction methods, bringing the total number of cases to be reviewed to about 37,000.

**Quotes attributable to the Minister for Health, Mental Health Shannon Fentiman:**

“Concerns have been brought to my attention since the 2022 Commission of Inquiry that relate to the automated DNA extraction method that was introduced in October 2007, under what is known as Project 13.

“The original Commission of Inquiry already recommended a number of reviews of DNA processes and sample cohorts, which the Queensland Government supports.

“This new inquiry will ensure a transparent and comprehensive review of matters raised after the original inquiry and is in line with the Queensland Government’s commitment to rebuilding the state’s forensic and DNA testing processes.

“It is why the Queensland Government is investing almost \$200 million to support the implementation of all 123 recommendations from the 2022 inquiry.

“We have already seen some very promising results since last year’s Inquiry, and this second Inquiry looking specifically at Project 13 will ensure that the public can have full confidence in our state’s forensic services.”

“I look forward to receiving Dr Annabelle Bennett AC’s final report and recommendations in November.”

**Quotes attributable to Attorney-General Yvette D’Ath:**

XXXX

XXXX

**ENDS**

**Theresa Stinson**

---

**From:** Natarjsha Kramer  
**Sent:** Thursday, 5 October 2023 7:07 AM  
**To:** Courtney Thompson  
**Subject:** Fwd: DNA COI Materials  
**Attachments:** image002.png; 231004 MR - New DNA Commission of Inquiry v4.docx; QAs - New Col forensic DNA testing in Queensland v3.docx; Talking Points - New DNA Commission of Inquiry v3.docx

Sent from my iPhone

Begin forwarded message:

**From:** Natarjsha Kramer [Irrelevant@ministerial.qld.gov.au](mailto:Irrelevant@ministerial.qld.gov.au)>  
**Date:** 4 October 2023 at 5:45:00 pm AEST  
**To:** Amanda Medew [Irrelevant@ministerial.qld.gov.au](mailto:Irrelevant@ministerial.qld.gov.au)>  
**Cc:** Phoenix Campbell [Irrelevant@ministerial.qld.gov.au](mailto:Irrelevant@ministerial.qld.gov.au)>  
**Subject:** DNA COI Materials

**Natarjsha Kramer**  
Principal Media Advisor  
Office of the Hon. Shannon Fentiman MP  
Minister for Health, Mental Health and Ambulance Services  
Minister for Women  
P [Irrelevant@ministerial.qld.gov.au](mailto:Irrelevant@ministerial.qld.gov.au)

## Q&As – New Commission of Inquiry into Forensic DNA Testing

### **There has already been a Commission of Inquiry into forensic DNA testing. Why is there a need for another one?**

Concerns have been raised publicly about Project 13 – the automated DNA extraction method that was introduced in 2007.

We have already committed to reassessing all serious crime cases since October 2007. Also, Rec 105 from last year's Inquiry recommended a retrospective review of the automated method.

However, this new Inquiry will be able to investigate these matters in even further depth. I want the public to have the utmost confidence in our forensic DNA systems, and that is what this is about.

### **So you are reopening the last year's Inquiry after calls from the LNP?**

I want to be clear that **we are not reopening** the last Commission of Inquiry, this is an entirely new one.

All the findings of last year's Commission of Inquiry remain in place, and the important task of implementing those recommendations will remain ongoing.

We have already seen amazing progress, with 34 of those recommendations being completed and 68 of them underway.

We have seen convictions for sexual assault and homicide. **This important work will continue.**

### **Is this a knee-jerk reaction to media coverage?**

Of course not. This decision has been made after careful consideration of the facts and the public interest.

We have already seen so much progress and good work done since last year's Inquiry, and this second Inquiry will ensure that the public can have even more confidence in our system.

## **Q&As – New Commission of Inquiry into Forensic DNA Testing**

### **What will the new inquiry examine?**

The Commissioner will undertake an independent Inquiry to further examine Project 13.

The Inquiry's Terms of Reference include:

- a review of recent public statements and other documents in relation to Project 13
- whether the recommendations from the 2022 inquiry are sufficient to address the matters raised and
- When undertaking the above inquiries, the Commissioner will be able to interview any, or all, experts who provided advice in relation to Project 13 in the 2022 Commission of Inquiry.

### **Will it look at whether Forensic Science Queensland CEO Linzi Wilson-Wilde misled the inquiry?**

The Inquiry can interview any experts who provided expert advice to the 2022 Commission of Inquiry.

It is for the Commissioner to determine what will be looked at and the manner in which those inquiries will be performed.

### **When will the Inquiry begin and end?**

The Inquiry will begin today, the 5<sup>th</sup> of October.

The Commissioner will deliver a final report by 17 November 2023.

### **Who is leading the Inquiry?**

The Commission will be led by Dr Annabelle Bennett.

Dr Bennett is a retired Judge of the Federal Court of Australia, the former president of the Australian Academy of Forensic Sciences, and was appointed as the Commissioner for the National Natural Disaster Arrangements Inquiry.

She is extremely qualified to carry out this important role, and I have the utmost confidence in her.

## **Q&As – New Commission of Inquiry into Forensic DNA Testing**

### **Will the hearings be held publicly?**

The Commissioner will be able to receive submissions and hold hearings – public or private – as they see fit.

Essentially, the decision about whether the hearings will be public will be a matter for the Commission to decide, but it is certainly within their power to do so.

### **Why isn't Walter Sofronoff KC involved?**

The new Commission will be completely independent of the first one and Walter Sofronoff KC is busy with Julie Dick SC chairing the reforms necessary as a result of the 2022 Commission of Inquiry.

### **Does this mean the former COI failed?**

Not at all. As a result of the initial Inquiry, Queensland's forensic DNA testing system is undergoing major reform.

Excellent progress is being made to renew our forensic science infrastructure; enhance information technology platforms; manage current criminal justice system impacts; and strengthen the quality and scientific integrity of forensic services.

### **Do you think Walter Sofronoff was misled?**

The information and advice provided to the original Commission of Inquiry will be matters for the new Commissioner to explore.

### **Do you have confidence in Linzi?**

Professor Linzi Wilson-Wilde OAM has done a remarkable job of leading Forensic Science Queensland in strengthening the quality and scientific integrity of forensic DNA and chemistry services within Queensland.

Under Professor Wilson-Wilde's leadership, FSQ has started work on, or completed, more than **70 per cent** of the recommendations stemming from the initial Commission of Inquiry.

## **Q&As – New Commission of Inquiry into Forensic DNA Testing**

### **Will Linzi be stood aside while the COI is under way?**

No. Professor Wilson-Wilde will continue leading FSQ and reforming the state's forensic DNA testing services.

### **What effect will this have on the operations of the lab?**

The FSQ laboratory will continue operating as normal.

### **How much testing has the lab done regarding the backlog of cases?**

To date, the lab has tested DNA samples in around 200 cases that had been reviewed as a result of the initial Inquiry.

### **How many cases are there in the backlog to be reviewed?**

As part of recommendations from the 2022 inquiry, FSQ was already reviewing whether automated DNA extraction methods were insufficient and for what period of time.

FSQ identified the need to review cases back to October 2007, with the flexibility to go further back if required.

Approximately 7000 additional serious crime and sexual assault cases will be reviewed as a result of insufficient automated DNA extraction methods, bringing the total number of cases to be reviewed to about 37,000.

### **Will you go back further with retesting if required?**

We are reviewing serious crime cases and samples back to 2007 and will go back further with serious cases if required.

### **Have you spoken with Vicki Blackburn and Kirsty Wright?**

Yes, I have. We take the concerns raised by Dr Kirsty Wright very seriously. And it's important that we ensure victims and victim's families have confidence in our justice system.

## **Q&As – New Commission of Inquiry into Forensic DNA Testing**

### **What will happen with the interim board?**

The interim board will continue overseeing work to reform Queensland's forensic DNA testing system.

### **How will any conflict of interest around ties between expert scientists and Professor Wilson-Wilde be handled?**

Professor Wilson-Wilde will not be involved in the new Inquiry, however, any close ties between her and participating scientists will be declared.

### **What is happening with the other scientists who are still at the lab who were involved with Project 13?**

Scientists who were working in the lab at the time Project 13 occurred may be asked to provide evidence but who is called, and what information is sought, is solely a matter for the Commissioner.



## New DNA Commission of Inquiry | XX October 2023

- The Queensland Government is committed to building a world-class forensic and DNA testing service.
- It is why I am today announcing a new independent Commission of Inquiry into forensic and DNA testing in Queensland.
- Led by **xxxxxxx**, the Inquiry will examine issues raised following the conclusion of 2022's inquiry.
- The Inquiry's terms of reference include:
  - reviewing recent public statements and other documents in relation to automated DNA extraction methods introduced under what is known as Project 13
  - whether the recommendations from the previous inquiry are sufficient to address that matter and
  - an ability for the Commissioner to call any, or all, experts who provided evidence as part of the 2022 Commission of Inquiry, as their evidence may relate to Project 13.
- The Commissioner's final report and recommendations will be completed by 17 November 2023
- Concerns have been brought to my attention since the 2022 Commission of Inquiry in relation to the automated DNA extraction method introduced in 2007.
- That is why it is appropriate to establish a new Commission of Inquiry.
- It will examine these issues in a transparent and comprehensive manner.
- This approach is consistent with the Queensland Government's firm commitment to rebuilding the state's forensic and DNA testing processes.
- It is why we are investing almost \$200 million to reform forensic and DNA testing, including implementing all 123 recommendations from the 2022 inquiry.
- Forensic Science Queensland has already committed to reviewing serious crime cases and samples back to 2007.
- It is important to note that a retrospective review of the automated method of DNA extraction, introduced in 2007 and processed by the MultiProbe II instrument, was also a recommendation in the 2022 Commission of Inquiry, and includes samples affected under Project 13.
- Specifically Recommendation 105 is as follows:

*The laboratory should conduct a retrospective review of positive control extraction batches processed by the MultiProbe® II instrument to determine if this extraction method was performing sub-optimally, and if so, the period of time in which a sub-optimal method was used and whether there is utility in retesting or re-analysing any potentially affected samples.*

- Approximately 7000 additional serious crime and sexual assault cases will be reviewed as a result of insufficient automated DNA extraction methods, bringing the total number of cases to be reviewed to about 37,000.
- I look forward to receiving xxxxxx's final report on 17 November.
- Thank you.



## Media release

Minister for Health, Mental Health, and Ambulance Services and Minister for Women  
The Honourable Shannon Fentiman MP

### **New Commission of Inquiry to examine DNA Project 13 Concerns**

- New independent Commission of Inquiry into Forensic DNA testing announced
- Inquiry will be led by retired Federal Court Judge Dr Annabelle Bennett AC SC and will address issues raised publicly since the 2022 Commission of Inquiry
- This includes further investigating claims raised about automated DNA extraction methods as they relate to a process known as 'Project 13'.

The Palaszczuk Government has announced a new independent Commission of Inquiry into Forensic DNA testing in Queensland.

Led by Dr Annabelle Bennett AC, the new Inquiry will examine concerns regarding Project 13 that have been raised following the conclusion of last year's Inquiry.

Dr Bennett is a retired Judge of the Federal Court of Australia, the former president of the Australian Academy of Forensic Sciences, and was appointed as the Commissioner for the National Natural Disaster Arrangements Inquiry.

The Inquiry's terms of reference include reviewing recent public statements and other documents in relation to automated DNA extraction methods introduced under what is known as Project 13 and whether the recommendations from the previous Inquiry are sufficient to address this matter.

The Commissioner will be able to interview any, or all, experts whose advice about DNA extraction methods as they relate to Project 13 helped inform the initial Commission of Inquiry's findings and recommendations.

The Commissioner's final report and recommendations will be completed by 17 November 2023.

Forensic Science Queensland has already committed to reviewing serious crime cases and associated samples back to 2007, with the flexibility to go further back if required.

A retrospective review of the automated method of DNA extraction, introduced in 2007 and processed by the MultiProbe II instrument, was also a recommendation in the 2022 Commission of Inquiry, and includes samples affected under Project 13.

Significant progress has been made so far on the delivery of recommendations from last year's Commission of Inquiry, with 34 recommendations having been completed and a further 68 being underway – equating to almost % of all recommendations.

The Government has committed almost \$200 million so far towards implementing these recommendations.

The progress so far has resulted in justice for victims of crime in Queensland, with new convictions achieved for sexual assault cases and one homicide conviction.

Approximately 7,000 additional serious crime and sexual assault cases will be reviewed as a result of insufficient automated DNA extraction methods, bringing the total number of cases to be reviewed to about 37,000.

**Quotes attributable to the Minister for Health, Mental Health Shannon Fentiman:**

“Concerns have been brought to my attention since the 2022 Commission of Inquiry that relate to the automated DNA extraction method that was introduced in October 2007, under what is known as Project 13.

“The original Commission of Inquiry already recommended a number of reviews of DNA processes and sample cohorts, which the Queensland Government supports.

“This new inquiry will ensure a transparent and comprehensive review of matters raised after the original inquiry and is in line with the Queensland Government’s commitment to rebuilding the state’s forensic and DNA testing processes.

“It is why the Queensland Government is investing almost \$200 million to support the implementation of all 123 recommendations from the 2022 inquiry.

“We have already seen some very promising results since last year’s Inquiry, and this second Inquiry looking specifically at Project 13 will ensure that the public can have full confidence in our state’s forensic services.”

“I look forward to receiving Dr Annabelle Bennett AC’s final report and recommendations in November.”

**Quotes attributable to Attorney-General Yvette D’Ath:**

XXXX

XXXX

**ENDS**

**Theresa Stinson**

---

**From:** Phoenix Campbell  
**Sent:** Thursday, 5 October 2023 8:12 AM  
**To:** Amanda Medew; Natarjsha Kramer  
**Subject:** RE: DNA COI Materials

Almost 83%, not more than.

I think it comes to 82.9%.

---

**From:** Amanda Medew **Irrelevant** ministerial.qld.gov.au>  
**Sent:** Thursday, October 5, 2023 7:53 AM  
**To:** Natarjsha Kramer **Irrelevant** ministerial.qld.gov.au>  
**Cc:** Phoenix Campbell **Irrelevant** ministerial.qld.gov.au>  
**Subject:** RE: DNA COI Materials

**Do you have confidence in Linzi?**

There's two reasons I have confidence in the work Professor Wilson-Wilde is currently undertaking – the governance that is now in place and the progress that has been made on the implementation of recommendations.

There is an interim advisory board of the most senior legal and forensic scientific minds available to Queensland – all of whom appointed based on relevant qualifications, skills, experience, knowledge and standing.

The purpose of this Board is to ensure accountability and transparency.

Professor Linzi Wilson-Wilde OAM has done a remarkable job of leading Forensic Science Queensland in strengthening the quality and scientific integrity of forensic DNA and chemistry services within Queensland.

Under Professor Wilson-Wilde's leadership, in just 8 months, FSQ has started work on, or completed, more than 83 per cent of the recommendations stemming from the initial Commission of Inquiry.

That progress has been reported to the Parliament and is publicly available.

We are seeing results – we are seeing sexual assault matters progressing that wouldn't have previously, and we have seen a conviction in a murder case.

---

**From:** Natarjsha Kramer **Irrelevant** @ministerial.qld.gov.au>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, October 4, 2023 5:45 PM  
**To:** Amanda Medew **Irrelevant** @ministerial.qld.gov.au>  
**Cc:** Phoenix Campbell **Irrelevant** inisterial.qld.gov.au>  
**Subject:** DNA COI Materials

**Natarjsha Kramer**

Principal Media Advisor

**Office of the Hon. Shannon Fentiman MP**

Minister for Health, Mental Health and Ambulance Services

Minister for Women



**Queensland**  
Government

P Irrelevant @ministerial.qld.gov.au

**Theresa Stinson**

---

**From:** Natarjsha Kramer  
**Sent:** Thursday, 5 October 2023 5:48 PM  
**To:** Shannon Fentiman  
**Cc:** Phoenix Campbell  
**Subject:** Fwd: ABC DNA second inquiry

Hey,

**Irrelevant** flagged with me she would ask these further questions. Same figures as were in the annual progress report. Can chat further about assisting her with any interviews.

Nat

Sent from my iPhone

Begin forwarded message:

**From:** news **Irrelevant** @health.qld.gov.au>  
**Date:** 5 October 2023 at 5:40:53 pm AEST  
**To:** Natarjsha Kramer **Irrelevant** @ministerial.qld.gov.au>, Rachel Western **Irrelevant** @ministerial.qld.gov.au>, Phoenix Campbell **Irrelevant** @ministerial.qld.gov.au>, Tracey Walker **Irrelevant** health.qld.gov.au>, Helen Couper **Irrelevant** @health.qld.gov.au>, news **Irrelevant** @health.qld.gov.au>  
**Subject:** RE: ABC DNA second inquiry

Hi all, this is an ABC enquiry we plan to send back to **Irrelevant** by 10am tomorrow (Friday). Please advise before then any issues.  
Thanks  
Darren

Hi **Irrelevant**,

Thanks for your enquiry.

Professor Wilson-Wilde is not available for interview. Mr Sofronoff is not an employee of Queensland Health, so you will need to liaise directly with him regarding an interview request.

**Please attribute to a Queensland Health spokesperson**

Forensic Science Queensland (FSQ) is recruiting an additional 40 scientists to assist with implementing recommendations from the 2022 Commission of Inquiry into Forensic DNA Testing.

FSQ has recruited 25 scientists to date, despite a limited pool of suitably qualified scientists nationally and globally.

The positive response demonstrates a desire from qualified and experienced scientists to be part of efforts to establish a world-class forensic DNA testing service in Queensland.

ENDS

---

**From:** Irrelevant [redacted] Irrelevant@abc.net.au>  
**Sent:** Thursday, 5 October 2023 2:33 PM  
**To:** news Irrelevant [redacted]@health.qld.gov.au>  
**Subject:** DNA second inquiry

Hi again, I just have some more questions.

They are:

1. Can I request an interview with Dr Linzi Wilson-Wilde and Walter Sofronoff please?
2. How many scientists does the DNA forensics laboratory need to continue with its work and to carry out the recommendations of the Sofronoff inquiry?
3. How many scientists need to be recruited to reach that number?
4. How many new scientists have been recruited this year?

With thanks, Irrelevant [redacted]

---

\*\*\*\*\*

Disclaimer: This email and any attachments may contain legally privileged or confidential information and may be protected by copyright. You must not use or disclose them other than for the purposes for which they were supplied. The privilege or confidentiality attached to this message and attachments is not waived by reason of mistaken delivery to you. If you are not the intended recipient, you must not use, disclose, retain, forward or reproduce this message or any attachments. If you receive this message in error, please notify the sender by return email or telephone and destroy and delete all copies. Unless stated otherwise, this email represents only the views of the sender and not the views of the Queensland Government.

Queensland Health carries out monitoring, scanning and blocking of emails and attachments sent from or to addresses within Queensland Health for the purposes of operating, protecting, maintaining and ensuring appropriate use of its computer network.

\*\*\*\*\*



**Theresa Stinson**

---

**From:** Natarjsha Kramer  
**Sent:** Thursday, 5 October 2023 11:00 AM  
**To:** Shannon Fentiman  
**Subject:** FW: HIBS SO FAR  
**Attachments:** image001.png; image002.png; 231005 - HIBS.docx

---

**From:** Courtney Thompson **Irrelevant** ministerial.qld.gov.au>  
**Sent:** Thursday, October 5, 2023 10:59 AM  
**To:** Natarjsha Kramer **Irrelevant** @ministerial.qld.gov.au>  
**Subject:** Fwd: HIBS SO FAR

Begin forwarded message:

**From:** Courtney Thompson **Irrelevant** ministerial.qld.gov.au>  
**Date:** 5 October 2023 at 07:14:13 GMT+10  
**To:** "@Premiers Media" **Irrelevant** ministerial.qld.gov.au>, "@Premiers Policy"  
**Irrelevant** @min.internal>  
**Subject:** HIBS SO FAR

Hi all – HIBs for today so far.

**Courtney Thompson**

Principal Media Advisor (she/her)

**Office of the Hon. Anastacia Palaszczuk MP**

Premier and Minister for the Olympic and Paralympic Games

---

M **Irrelevant** @ministerial.qld.gov.au

# Irrelevant

# Irrelevant

# Irrelevant

# Irrelevant

## DNA INQUIRY

Our government is committed to rebuilding the state's forensic and DNA testing processes.

That's why the Health Minister today announced retired Federal Court Judge Annabelle Bennett SC will conduct a new commission of inquiry into matters raised after the original inquiry.

We expect to receive the final report and recommendations in November.

Our government is investing almost \$200m to support the implementation of all 123 recommendations from the 2022 inquiry.

We have already seen some very promising results.

The new enquiry ensures that the public can have full confidence in our state's forensic services.

### Background

- Minister Fentiman address media at 9am today
- She announced a new commission of inquiry into the DNA lab
- **The Inquiry's terms of reference include:**
  - reviewing recent public statements and other documents in relation to automated DNA extraction methods introduced under what is known as Project 13
  - whether the recommendations from the previous inquiry are sufficient to address that matter and
  - an ability for the Commissioner to call any, or all, experts who provided evidence as part of the 2022 Commission of Inquiry, as their evidence may relate to Project 13.

Approximately 7000 additional serious crime and sexual assault cases will be reviewed as a result of insufficient automated DNA extraction methods, bringing the total number of cases to be reviewed to about 37,000.

■ NEW INQUIRY LAUNCHED INTO FAILURES ■ VICTIMS TO GET SECOND CHANCE AT JUSTICE

# Tearing open cover-up of DNA lab's Project 13

EXCLUSIVE

DAVID MURRAY  
HEDLEY THOMAS  
MICHAEL MCKENNA

A new commission of inquiry will be launched into a catastrophically flawed DNA extraction method that has been blamed for samples failing to identify Shandee Blackburn's killer in 2013 and that may have denied Queensland victims of crime crucial evidence for nine years.

Health Minister Shannon Fentiman has commissioned a short, sharp public inquiry after weeks of revelations in The Australian that have raised doubts about test results in thousands more criminal cases and have rocked the new management of the state's DNA lab.

New and serious allegations against the lab have emerged since the end of retired judge Walter Sofronoff's landmark commission of inquiry last year, triggered by painstaking investigations by forensic biologist Kirsty Wright and The Australian's podcast Shandee's Story.

Ms Fentiman said on Wednesday she had appointed retired Federal Court judge Annabelle Bennett SC to conduct the inquiry, amid concerns about conflicts of interest in a high-powered advisory board that has only just been set up to watch over the lab.

"This new inquiry will ensure a transparent and comprehensive review of matters raised after the original inquiry and is in line with the Queensland government's commitment to rebuilding the state's forensic and DNA testing processes," Ms Fentiman said.

Dr Bennett is the former presi-

dent of the Australian Academy of Forensic Sciences, and was a commissioner on the National Natural Disaster Arrangements inquiry. She will hold public hearings and be able to call witnesses to give evidence under oath.

Her final report and recommendations from the new DNA inquiry are due to be completed by November 17.

The inquiry's terms of reference will include reviewing recent public statements and other documents about a flawed automated DNA extraction method introduced in the lab in 2007, and whether recommendations from the previous inquiry are sufficient to address the matter.

The Australian last month revealed the lab implemented the extraction method despite knowing it was failing to recover DNA, and that it may have missed crucial evidence in serious crimes for nine years. About 100,000 crime scene samples would have been processed using variations of the automated method, which saved the lab time and was implemented in a period of intense pressure from courts, government and the public

to deal with testing delays and backlogs, Dr Wright said.

The method has been blamed by Dr Wright for the failure to recover evidence in, and to solve, Blackburn's brutal stabbing murder as she walked home from work in Mackay in central Queensland.

The new scientist in charge of the lab, Linzi Wilson-Wilde, has

been drawn into the scandal because she examined the method for the Sofronoff inquiry and failed in her expert report to detail the serious problems it was having in recovering DNA. In her work for the inquiry, Professor Wilson-Wilde reviewed a "Project 13" report from August 2008 that showed the automated method was recovering up to 92 per cent less DNA than a manual method.

The Project 13 report's abstract recommended the automated method be introduced after falsely claiming results were "comparable" to the manual method.

Dr Wright said on Wednesday night she welcomed the government's announcement to open an independent inquiry into Project 13. "I believe it is the only way to get to the truth behind the original decision in 2007 to implement the failed method, to correctly identify all cases that were affected by the failed method, and to ensure they are properly reviewed and tested," Dr Wright said.

"The enormity of this issue is still hard to comprehend for the average Queenslanders."

The inquiry's findings may  
*Continued on Page 2*

# Tearing open cover-up of DNA lab's Project 13 testing failures

*Continued from Page 1*

lead to tens of thousands of victims getting another chance of justice, and tens of thousands of violent offenders being removed from our streets.

"It really is that serious."

Blackburn's mother, Vicki, and Dr Wright say they have lost confidence in Professor Wilson-Wilde and have called for her to quit.

The pair had rejected a previous plan – put to them in separate, private meetings with Ms Fentiman last week – for the new Forensic Science Queensland advisory board to conduct a review and had instead called for a commission of inquiry with the appropriate powers to gather evidence and protect witnesses.

The advisory board was set up to assist the government with the complex science of DNA and to provide an independent body for whistleblowers to approach, to ensure the mistakes of the past were never repeated.

However, The Australian last month revealed concerns that Professor Wilson-Wilde's connections with the board's three scientific experts overseeing her work left whistleblowers nowhere to turn.

Dr Wright said it was well known in the national forensic community that Professor Wilson-Wilde was a close colleague and friend of one board member, Victoria Police forensic services director Rebecca Kogios.

Professor Wilson-Wilde was also connected to the advisory board's two other scientific experts, Niamh Nic Daeid and Sheila Willis, through the Leverhulme Research Centre for Forensic Science at the University of Dundee.

This newspaper also revealed Professor Wilson-Wilde helped select the board's scientific members now overseeing her, in tandem with Dr Kogios.

Professor Wilson-Wilde has said that prior to her appointment, she and Dr Kogios last year provided a list of 16 possible local and international candidates for the board, "which included us".

Further, Professor Wilson-Wilde is an ex-officio member of the board that is meant to be overseeing her.

About 7000 additional serious crime and sexual assault cases will be reviewed as a result of problems with automated DNA extraction methods at the laboratory, bringing the total number of cases to be reviewed to about 37,000, the state government said this week. Dr Wright said this vastly underestimated the number of potential affected cases.

Ms Fentiman said: "Concerns have been brought to my attention since the 2022 commission of inquiry that relate to the automated DNA extraction method that was introduced in October 2007, under what is known as Project 13.

"The original commission of inquiry already recommended a

number of reviews of DNA processes and sample cohorts, which the Queensland government supports.

"It is why the Queensland government is investing almost \$200m to support the implementation of all 123 recommendations from the 2022 inquiry.

"We have already seen some very promising results since last year's inquiry, and this second inquiry looking specifically at Project 13 will ensure that the public can have full confidence in our state's forensic services."

"I look forward to receiving Dr Annabelle Bennett AC's final report and recommendations in November."

The Sofronoff inquiry made 123 recommendations, with the state government saying that 34 have been completed and a further 68 are underway.

Mr Sofronoff's extraordinary findings in December last year of scientific failures and fraud have already led the Palaszczuk government to invest \$200m in rebuilding the DNA lab. Huge reforms have already been credited with new convictions in a homicide and sexual assaults.

## The catastrophe called Project 13

How The Weekend Australian broke the story on September 9



## New DNA probe

A new commission of inquiry will be launched into the catastrophic failings of Queensland's state-run forensic laboratory. Health Minister Shannon Fentiman will announce retired Federal Court judge Annabelle Bennett SC will be appointed to conduct the short and sharp inquiry.

James Hall reports P5

# Lab fail sparks new inquiry

## DNA cases embroiled in debacle blows out to 37,000

James Hall

A new commission of inquiry will be launched into the catastrophic failings of Queensland's state-run forensic laboratory, as it was revealed the number of cases needing review had soared to 37,000.

The surge in cases sparked calls for the second inquiry, which Health Minister Shannon Fentiman is expected to announce on Thursday.

Retired Federal Court judge Annabelle Bennett SC will be appointed to conduct the short and sharp inquiry, which will include holding public hearings and calling witnesses to give evidence under oath.

"This new inquiry will ensure a transparent and comprehensive review of matters raised after the original inquiry and is in line with the Queensland government's commitment to rebuilding the state's forensic and DNA testing processes," Ms Fentiman told *The Australian*.

The *Courier-Mail* revealed in June the number of serious cases was about 30,000 but this has since grown following revelations of a flawed extraction method used in cases as far back as 2007, including the horrific murder of Mackay

woman Shandee Blackburn.

Dr Bennett's final report and recommendations from the new DNA inquiry will be due on November 17.

The extraction method, which included the use of automation rather than scientists testing by hand to save time, was not publicly discussed during the initial inquiry.

Documents with details of the method, included in a report known as Project 13, only surfaced when the inquiry had concluded. The *Australian* reported. The automation testing process was found to routinely fail to detect DNA.

Queensland Health confirmed a review of records by the Queensland Police Service revealed about 7000 additional cases needed to be reviewed as

a result of Project 13. Opposition health spokeswoman Ros Bates described the growing backlog of cases as a "bombshell admission".

"After repeatedly denying additional cases were impacted, they have now reluctantly admitted additional cases have been compromised," she said.

"Faith in the integrity of our justice system will be rocked by these new revelations."

The commission of inquiry last year discovered the forensic

lab had incorrectly reported samples collected from serious crimes had insufficient DNA for processing.

The revelations led to tens of thousands of cases being reviewed and the Queensland forensic lab being overhauled.

Last month, the opposition joined forces with Vicki Blackburn, whose daughter Shandee's horrific murder in Mackay 10 years ago remains unsolved, to demand the government reopens the inquiry.

Ms Blackburn said revelations of Project 13 had left her "shattered completely".

# Irrelevant

**Theresa Stinson**

---

**From:** news [Irrelevant]@health.qld.gov.au>  
**Sent:** Thursday, 5 October 2023 12:23 PM  
**To:** Rachel Western  
**Cc:** Natarjsha Kramer; Phoenix Campbell  
**Subject:** RE: Health inquiry

Hi Rachel,

**Irrelevant**

Cheers,  
Nigel

-----Original Message-----

**From:** Rachel Western [Irrelevant]@ministerial.qld.gov.au>  
**Sent:** Thursday, 5 October 2023 12:02 PM  
**To:** news [Irrelevant]@health.qld.gov.au>  
**Cc:** Natarjsha Kramer [Irrelevant]@ministerial.qld.gov.au>; Phoenix Campbell [Irrelevant]@ministerial.qld.gov.au>  
**Subject:** FW: Health inquiry

This email originated from outside Queensland Health. DO NOT click on any links or open attachments unless you recognise the sender and know the content is safe.

Hey team and Brent (apologies if I accidentally hung up on you),

Are you able to help with the attached at all? We have an enquiry below, but I think we have some lines on it already. If you have any updates though from CHO let me know.

Kind regards,

Rachel

Rachel Western  
Media Advisor  
Office of Hon. Shannon Fentiman MP  
Minister for Health, Mental Health, and Ambulance Services Minister for Women

---

[Irrelevant] | Email: [Irrelevant]@ministerial.qld.gov.au

-----Original Message-----

**From:** Health [Irrelevant]ministerial.qld.gov.au>  
**Sent:** Thursday, October 5, 2023 11:33 AM  
**To:** @HealthMedia [Irrelevant]@ministerial.qld.gov.au>  
**Subject:** FW: Health inquiry

-----Original Message-----

**From:** Rob Mellett [Irrelevant]@boonahnewspapers.com.au>

Sent: Thursday, October 5, 2023 10:56 AM  
To: Health **Irrelevant**@ministerial.qld.gov.au>  
Subject: Health inquiry

Please, a media enquiry for the Hon Shannon Fentiman.

Dear Ms Fentiman,

A new commission of inquiry has been launched into a flawed DNA extraction method blamed for samples failing to identify Shandee Blackburn's killer in 2013.

**Irrelevant**

Kind regards

Rob Mellett

Ipswich Tribune

Deadline

Noon Friday.

This email, together with any attachments, is intended for the named recipient(s) only; and may contain privileged and confidential information. If received in error, you are asked to inform the sender as quickly as possible and delete this email and any copies of this from your computer system network.

If not an intended recipient of this email, you must not copy, distribute or take any action(s) that relies on it; any form of disclosure, modification, distribution and /or publication of this email is also prohibited.

Unless stated otherwise, this email represents only the views of the sender and not the views of the Queensland Government.

Please consider the environment before printing this email.

\*\*\*\*\*

Disclaimer: This email and any attachments may contain legally privileged or confidential information and may be protected by copyright. You must not use or disclose them other than for the purposes for which they were supplied. The privilege or confidentiality attached to this message and attachments is not waived by reason of mistaken delivery to you. If you are not the intended recipient, you must not use, disclose, retain, forward or reproduce this message or any attachments. If you receive this message in error, please notify the sender by return email or telephone and destroy and delete all copies. Unless stated otherwise, this email represents only the views of the sender and not the views of the Queensland Government.

Queensland Health carries out monitoring, scanning and blocking of emails and attachments sent from or to addresses within Queensland Health for the purposes of operating, protecting, maintaining and ensuring appropriate use of its computer network.

\*\*\*\*\*

**Theresa Stinson**

---

**From:** Natarjsha Kramer  
**Sent:** Thursday, 5 October 2023 7:43 PM  
**To:** news  
**Cc:** Rachel Western; Phoenix Campbell; Tracey Walker; Helen Couper  
**Subject:** Re: ABC DNA second inquiry

No issues with this one going. Thanks!

Natarjsha

Sent from my iPhone

On 5 Oct 2023, at 5:40 pm, news [Irrelevant@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:Irrelevant@health.qld.gov.au) wrote:

Hi all, this is an ABC enquiry we plan to send back to [Irrelevant](mailto:Irrelevant) by 10am tomorrow (Friday). Please advise before then any issues.  
Thanks  
Darren

Hi [Irrelevant](mailto:Irrelevant),

Thanks for your enquiry.

Professor Wilson-Wilde is not available for interview. Mr Sofronoff is not an employee of Queensland Health, so you will need to liaise directly with him regarding an interview request.

**Please attribute to a Queensland Health spokesperson**

Forensic Science Queensland (FSQ) is recruiting an additional 40 scientists to assist with implementing recommendations from the 2022 Commission of Inquiry into Forensic DNA Testing.

FSQ has recruited 25 scientists to date, despite a limited pool of suitably qualified scientists nationally and globally.

The positive response demonstrates a desire from qualified and experienced scientists to be part of efforts to establish a world-class forensic DNA testing service in Queensland.

**ENDS**

---

**From:** [IrrelevantIrrelevant@abc.net.au](mailto:IrrelevantIrrelevant@abc.net.au)  
**Sent:** Thursday, 5 October 2023 2:33 PM  
**To:** news [Irrelevant@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:Irrelevant@health.qld.gov.au)  
**Subject:** DNA second inquiry

Hi again, I just have some more questions.

They are:

1. Can I request an interview with Dr Linzi Wilson-Wilde and Walter Sofronoff please?
2. Have many scientists does the DNA forensics laboratory need to continue with its work and to carry out the recommendations of the Sofronoff inquiry?
3. How many scientists need to be recruited to reach that number?
4. How many new scientists have been recruited this year?

With thanks, Irrelevant

---

\*\*\*\*\*

Disclaimer: This email and any attachments may contain legally privileged or confidential information and may be protected by copyright. You must not use or disclose them other than for the purposes for which they were supplied. The privilege or confidentiality attached to this message and attachments is not waived by reason of mistaken delivery to you. If you are not the intended recipient, you must not use, disclose, retain, forward or reproduce this message or any attachments. If you receive this message in error, please notify the sender by return email or telephone and destroy and delete all copies. Unless stated otherwise, this email represents only the views of the sender and not the views of the Queensland Government.

Queensland Health carries out monitoring, scanning and blocking of emails and attachments sent from or to addresses within Queensland Health for the purposes of operating, protecting, maintaining and ensuring appropriate use of its computer network.

\*\*\*\*\*

**Theresa Stinson**

---

**From:** Cullen Robinson  
**Sent:** Thursday, 5 October 2023 8:44 AM  
**To:** Natarjsha Kramer  
**Subject:** Re: quotes

Probs to late but policy advisor said this

I would consider removing the word "new" as it's too ambiguous

Sent from my iPhone

On 5 Oct 2023, at 8:11 am, Natarjsha Kramer **Irrelevant** @ministerial.qld.gov.au> wrote:

83 - I sent the wrong one to you sorry.

Sent from my iPhone

On 5 Oct 2023, at 8:05 am, Cullen Robinson  
**Irrelevant** @ministerial.qld.gov.au> wrote:

I think there's a missing number towards the end around a %

Sent from my iPhone

On 5 Oct 2023, at 7:53 am, Natarjsha Kramer  
**Irrelevant** @ministerial.qld.gov.au> wrote:

---

**From:** Cullen Robinson **Irrelevant** @ministerial.qld.gov.au>  
**Sent:** Thursday, October 5, 2023 7:09 AM  
**To:** Natarjsha Kramer **Irrelevant** @ministerial.qld.gov.au>  
**Subject:** quotes

**Quotes attributable to the Attorney-General, Yvette D'Ath:**

"It's vitally important Queenslanders have faith in all aspects of their justice system including the collection, extraction and testing of DNA.

"This new Commission of Inquiry will answer questions and concerns recently raised in relation to what is known as Project 13.

"Dr Bennett is an experienced and respected jurist who is a great choice to lead the Commission of Inquiry.

“Victims of crime and their families are entitled to learn the truth.

“If we are to rebuild trust in our systems, we need to build on the good work already undertaken to turn Forensic Science Queensland into a world leading facility.

<image002.png>

**Cullen Robinson**

Principal Media Advisor

Office of the Hon Yvette D’Ath MP

Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence  
Leader of the House

---

P Irrelevant

| Email:

Irrelevant [@ministerial.qld.gov.au](mailto: @ministerial.qld.gov.au)

1 William Street, Brisbane Q 4000 GPO Box 48,

Brisbane Q 4001

<MR - New DNA Commission of Inquiry v5.docx>



**Theresa Stinson**

---

**From:** Rachel Western  
**Sent:** Friday, 6 October 2023 10:36 AM  
**To:** Emilia Hutchinson  
**Cc:** Natarjsha Kramer; Phoenix Campbell  
**Subject:** RE: MEDIA ENQUIRY - IPSWICH WEST

Here you go – let me know if any issues: [audio of CHO presser](#).

---

**From:** Emilia Hutchinson **Irrelevant** @ministerial.qld.gov.au>  
**Sent:** Friday, October 6, 2023 10:35 AM  
**To:** Rachel Western **Irrelevant** @ministerial.qld.gov.au>  
**Cc:** Natarjsha Kramer **Irrelevant** @ministerial.qld.gov.au>; Phoenix Campbell **Irrelevant** @ministerial.qld.gov.au>  
**Subject:** RE: MEDIA ENQUIRY - IPSWICH WEST

Not far off I'm told!

Do you mind flicking me the transcript or a link to the audio of John Gerrard's pressa?

Thanks!

---

**From:** Rachel Western **Irrelevant** @ministerial.qld.gov.au>  
**Sent:** Friday, October 6, 2023 10:22 AM  
**To:** Emilia Hutchinson **Irrelevant** @ministerial.qld.gov.au>  
**Cc:** Natarjsha Kramer **Irrelevant** @ministerial.qld.gov.au>; Phoenix Campbell **Irrelevant** @ministerial.qld.gov.au>  
**Subject:** FW: MEDIA ENQUIRY - IPSWICH WEST  
**Importance:** High

FYI – see below – we have another from the same journo. Have we heard back from DESBT yet?

Kind regards,

Rachel

Rachel Western

Media Advisor

Office of Hon. Shannon Fentiman MP

Minister for Health, Mental Health, and Ambulance Services  
Minister for Women



Queensland  
Government

**Irrelevant** @ministerial.qld.gov.au

---

**From:** healthclo **Irrelevant** @ministerial.qld.gov.au>  
**Sent:** Friday, October 6, 2023 10:16 AM  
**To:** Natarjsha Kramer **Irrelevant** @ministerial.qld.gov.au>; Phoenix Campbell **Irrelevant** @ministerial.qld.gov.au>; Rachel Western **Irrelevant** @ministerial.qld.gov.au>  
**Cc:** Madeline Cunnington **Irrelevant** @ministerial.qld.gov.au>  
**Subject:** MEDIA ENQUIRY - IPSWICH WEST  
**Importance:** High

Media enquiry.

Can someone please make contact with the journo and provide a response for Jim?

Can you let me know what actions have been taken (once done) and I'll let Jim know.

Thanks,  
Michaela

**Michaela Edwards** (she/her)

Assistant Policy Advisor & Caucus Liaison Officer (Mon, Tues, Wed, Fri)

Office of the Hon. Shannon Fentiman MP



Queensland  
Government

Minister for Health, Mental Health and Ambulance Services  
Minister for Women

P Irrelevant @ministerial.qld.gov.au

Queensland

Good jobs  
Better services  
Great lifestyle

---

**From:** Ipswich West Electorate Office Irrelevant @parliament.qld.gov.au>

**Sent:** Friday, October 6, 2023 6:30 AM

**To:** healthclo Irrelevant @ministerial.qld.gov.au>

**Subject:** Fwd: Media enquiry

Hi

I refer to the attached email.

Could you assist me with a response to the email.

Jim Madden

Get [Outlook for iOS](#)

---

**From:** Rob Mellett Irrelevant @boonahnewspapers.com.au>

**Sent:** Thursday, October 5, 2023 10:59:35 AM

**To:** Ipswich West Electorate Office Irrelevant @parliament.qld.gov.au>

**Subject:** Media enquiry

Please, a media enquiry for Jim.

Dear Jim,

A new commission of inquiry has been launched into a flawed DNA extraction method blamed for samples failing to identify Shandee Blackburn's killer in 2013.

Would you now commit to pushing for a health inquiry into the deleterious effects of the waste and recycling industry at Swanbank in Ipswich on residents?

Kind regards

Rob Mellett

Ipswich Tribune

Deadline

Noon Friday.

---

Consider the environment before you print this email.

NOTICE - This e-mail and any attachments are confidential and only for the use of the addressee.

If you have received this e-mail in error, you are strictly prohibited from using, forwarding, printing, copying or dealing in anyway whatsoever with it, and are requested to reply immediately by e-mail to the sender or by telephone to the Parliamentary Service on +61 7 3553 6000.

Any views expressed in this e-mail are the author's, except where the e-mail makes it clear otherwise. The unauthorised publication of an e-mail and any attachments generated for the official functions of the Parliamentary Service, the Legislative Assembly, its Committees or Members may constitute a contempt of the Queensland Parliament. If the information contained in this e-mail and any attachments becomes the subject of any request under Right to information legislation, the author or the Parliamentary Service should be notified.

It is the addressee's responsibility to scan this message for viruses. The Parliamentary Service does not warrant that the information is free from any virus, defect or error.

**Theresa Stinson**

**From:** SDLO [Irrelevant]@health.qld.gov.au>  
**Sent:** Friday, 1 September 2023 6:12 PM  
**To:** Alex Mayfield; Amanda Medew; Amy Goodwin; Amy Louise Melville; Ben Armstrong; Brett Reed; Claire Daly; CLLO; DG correspondence; Estimates; Finn Semple; Hamish Swanson; Jacqueline Quigg; James Farrell; Jess Burns; John Gerrard; Julie Shilton-Bevan; Kyle Fogarty; Luke Richmond; Madeline Cunnington; Mark Gibb; Melleesa Cowie; Michael Walsh; Miranda Claughton; Natarjsha Kramer; Nellie Gordon; news; Olivia Amsden; Phoenix Campbell; Rachel Western; Renaie Tesch; Sabina Mandic; Sally Gannon; Stephen Stewart; Tracey Walker; Trish Nielsen  
**Subject:** UPDATED HIB - Recent media interest in Forensic Science Queensland  
**Attachments:** HIB - Recent media interest in Forensic Science Queensland.docx; HIB - Recent media interest in Forensic Science Queensland.pdf; Attachment 1 - Articles published in the Australian - 090923 and 110923.pdf

Good afternoon

Please find attached a Hot Issues Brief (HIB) that has been updated in relation to recent media interest around Forensic Science Queensland.

Updates are reflected in yellow.

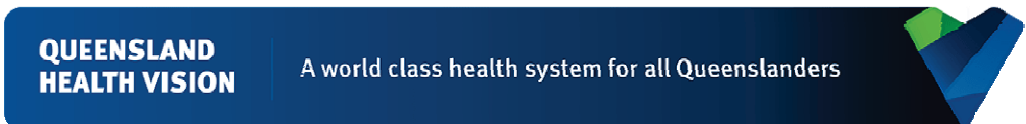
Please note that print and online media articles that are due to be published on or around today, 15 September 2023, to coincide with the release of a further episode of the Shandee's Legacy podcast and will further build on themes and issues in associated media published by The Australian last week.

Regards,  
Alex



**Alex Mayfield**  
A/Senior Departmental Liaison Officer  
Ministerial and Executive Services,  
Office of the Director-General | Queensland Health

**P** [Irrelevant]  
**E** [Irrelevant]@health.qld.gov.au  
**W** health.qld.gov.au  
**A** Level 37, 1 William Street, BRISBANE



Queensland Health acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land across Queensland, and pays respect to First Nations Elders past, present and future.

**From:** SDLO  
**Sent:** Friday, 1 September 2023 6:37 PM  
**To:** Alex Mayfield [Irrelevant]@health.qld.gov.au>; Amanda Medew [Irrelevant]@ministerial.qld.gov.au>; Amy Goodwin [Irrelevant]@health.qld.gov.au>; Amy Louise Melville [Irrelevant]@health.qld.gov.au>; Ben Armstrong [Irrelevant]@health.qld.gov.au>; Brett Reed [Irrelevant]@ministerial.qld.gov.au>; Claire Daly [Irrelevant]@health.qld.gov.au>; CLLO [Irrelevant]@health.qld.gov.au>; Denise Spokes [Irrelevant]@health.qld.gov.au>; DG correspondence [Irrelevant]@health.qld.gov.au>; DL-ELT\_Persona [Irrelevant]@health.qld.gov.au>; Estimates [Irrelevant]@health.qld.gov.au>; Finn Semple

Irrelevant @ministerial.qld.gov.au>; Hamish Swanson Irrelevant @ministerial.qld.gov.au>; Jacqueline Quigg Irrelevant @ambulance.qld.gov.au>; James Farrell Irrelevant @ministerial.qld.gov.au>; Jess Burns Irrelevant @health.qld.gov.au>; Julie Shilton-Bevan Irrelevant @health.qld.gov.au>; Kyle Fogarty Irrelevant @health.qld.gov.au>; Luke Richmond Irrelevant @ministerial.qld.gov.au>; Madeline Cunnington Irrelevant ministerial.qld.gov.au>; Mark Gibb Irrelevant @health.qld.gov.au>; Melleesa Cowie Irrelevant @health.qld.gov.au>; Michael Walsh Irrelevant @health.qld.gov.au>; Michaela Edwards Irrelevant @ministerial.qld.gov.au>; Miranda Claughton Irrelevant @health.qld.gov.au>; Natarisha Kramer Irrelevant @ministerial.qld.gov.au>; news Irrelevant @health.qld.gov.au>; Nick Steele Irrelevant hea via Amsden Irrelevant @ministerial.qld.gov.au>; Phoenix Campbell Irrelevant @ministerial.qld.gov.au>; Rachel Western Irrelevant @ministerial.qld.gov.au>; Renaie Tesch Irrelevant @health.qld.gov.au>; Sabina Mandic Irrelevant @health.qld.gov.au>; Sally Gannon Irrelevant @health.qld.gov.au>; Stephen Stewart Irrelevant @health.qld.gov.au>; Tracey Walker Irrelevant @health.qld.gov.au>; Trish Nielsen Irrelevant @health.qld.gov.au>

Subject: HIB - Forensic Science Queensland Media interviews

Good evening,

Please find attached a Hot Issues Brief (HIB) prepared by Forensic Science Queensland in relation recent media interviews undertaken by Professor Linzi Wilson-Wilde OAM, Chief Executive Officer, Forensic Science Queensland (FSQ).

The HIB was prepared noting that further media articles may be published post interviews.

Regards,  
Sabina



**Sabina Mandic**

A/Principal Briefing and Liaison Officer  
Office of the Director-General and System Strategy  
Division | Queensland Health

P Irrelevant  
E Irrelevant @health.qld.gov.au  
W health.qld.gov.au



**HEALTHQ32** Our vision is to be a dynamic and responsive health system where our workforce is valued and empowered to provide world-class healthcare to all Queenslanders.



Queensland Health acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land across Queensland, and pays respect to First Nations Elders past, present and future.

\*\*\*\*\*

Disclaimer: This email and any attachments may contain legally privileged or confidential information and may be protected by copyright. You must not use or disclose them other than for the purposes for which they were supplied. The privilege or confidentiality attached to this message and attachments is not waived by reason of mistaken delivery to you. If you are not the intended recipient, you must not use, disclose, retain, forward or reproduce this message or any attachments. If you receive this message in error, please notify the sender by return

email or telephone and destroy and delete all copies. Unless stated otherwise, this email represents only the views of the sender and not the views of the Queensland Government.

Queensland Health carries out monitoring, scanning and blocking of emails and attachments sent from or to addresses within Queensland Health for the purposes of operating, protecting, maintaining and ensuring appropriate use of its computer network.

\*\*\*\*\*



09 SEP, 2023

## The catastrophe called Project 13

Weekend Australian, Australia



Page 1 of 3

# The catastrophe called Project 13

## EXCLUSIVE

DAVID MURRAY  
HEDLEY THOMAS

The independent forensic scientist who triggered last year's landmark inquiry into Queensland's DNA lab believes she has found the origins of why samples failed to identify Shandee Blackburn's killer, in a discovery that raises doubts about results in thousands more serious crimes.

A flawed DNA extraction method used in Blackburn's unsolved murder was introduced despite the lab knowing it was catastrophically failing to recover DNA, and may have failed victims of crime and the justice system for nine years, Kirsty Wright has revealed after reviewing documents published by the inquiry.

About 100,000 crime scene samples would have been processed using variations of the automated method, which saved the lab time and was implemented in a period of intense pressure from the courts, government, media and public to deal with testing delays and backlogs, Dr Wright said.

The Australian's investigative podcast *Shandee's Story* explored the vicious stabbing murder of 23-year-old Blackburn with the help of Dr Wright, exposing serious scientific failures in the lab that were later confirmed and expanded on by retired judge Walter Sofronoff's inquiry.

"The reason you did this podcast was to understand why Shandee's offender was never identified. The answer is Project 13," Dr Wright said.

"This is the very start of it. This decision in 2007, I believe, is the reason why. And it's not just Shandee's case. It's many, many years of cases. It's Shandee's case, multiply that by however many thousand."

Problems with the automated DNA extraction method used for Blackburn's samples were discovered by Dr Wright and two globally respected experts, Jo Veth and Bruce Budowle, only very late in the inquiry.

Dr Wright has since returned to the very beginning of the method, introduced in October 2007. On the DNA inquiry's website, she found a report on Project 13 that tested the automated method on mock samples and recommended its use.

*Continued on Page 5*



## SHANDEE'S STORY

New podcast episode out now



09 SEP, 2023

## The catastrophe called Project 13

Weekend Australian, Australia



Page 2 of 3

# Why Shandee Blackburn's killer is still walking free

Continued from Page 1

The report's abstract or executive summary stated that the results of the automated method were "comparable" to a manual method.

But in the body of the report, the data showed the automated method recovered up to 92 per cent less DNA than the manual method and was 100 times less sensitive.

The new boss of the lab, professor Linzi Wilson-Wilde, agreed with Dr Wright's main contention about Project 13, its catastrophic yield failure and the deeply misleading summary in the report that backed the automated method.

"The entire project wasn't scientifically valid," Professor Wilson-Wilde said.

"There is a significant potential and a real-world outcome that introducing a method with such a significant difference in the yield of DNA that it would have had an impact on the ability to identify and retrieve DNA from crime scene samples."

Dr Wright said she did not think the report was meant to see the light of day, let alone be on the internet for anyone to download.

"It's their own data that shows in 2007, before they introduced this method, they knew that it was failing, and failing astronomically," Dr Wright said.

"There was no way that this method would be able to get DNA from trace samples. It was struggling to get DNA from visible bloodstains and tape lifts. They're all of the things that we saw in Shandee's case.

"I believe that the failure to identify Shandee's murderer can be traced back to Project 13, this deceptive decision that was made in 2007 to knowingly introduce a flawed method that these managers, these senior scientists, knew

would fail. You don't even have to be a scientist, to look at this data, to look at Project 13, and see that this method absolutely should never be used on crime scene evidence. It was a certainty to fail."

Between 2007 and 2016 the lab

made some significant changes to the automated method, including adding a manual step, which would have improved the recovery of DNA, Professor Wilson-Wilde said.

"But to what extent? We don't know exactly. And so what we need to do is review the cases to see whether DNA yield could have been an issue in those cases.

"I believe there will be additional cases that we will also need review in that major crime category.

"Our scope has widened based on our review of Project 13. Thank you for bringing this to my attention from this perspective. If we can solve more crimes, we're doing our job."

Dr Wright said that in 2012-13, it was recovering four times less DNA than another extraction

method used in the lab. "So we know that it was still failing in 2013," she said.

She found no evidence in the vast amount of material published by the inquiry that the yield issue was resolved before the lab stopped using it in 2016.

As soon as the automated extraction method was introduced, it caused serious and major cross-contamination of samples.

One scientist told the inquiry the contamination was a lab's "worst nightmare", and another said she had heard it led to a sexual assault complainant being wrongly questioned about a murder.

Dr Wright says the contamination crisis consumed the lab's time and acted as a smokescreen for the separate, systemic failure to recover DNA.

She said she had been curious to understand how a commercial method that worked exceptionally well internationally had failed in the hands of the Queensland Health lab.

She was astounded to find scientists involved in the project

decided to change critical settings that the manufacturer recommended for the method to work.

"They didn't only change those settings a little bit, they drastically changed two or three key settings, and I believe that's the reason why this method was failing," she said.

Mr Sofronoff KC found that under managing scientist Cathie Allen's leadership the lab prioritised speed of testing, to the detriment of victims of crime who were denied crucial evidence.

The automated method was introduced before Ms Allen—who was suspended and then sacked in May—became managing scientist in July 2008. Previous managing scientist Vanessa Ientile, who is listed as one of the Project 13 report's authors, this week declined to comment.

Another senior scientist listed as an author still works at the lab.

At this stage it is not known if scientists named as co-authors of the report were all across the failure of the automated method, or who wrote the abstract. It may take an inquiry from those with

stronger powers to find answers.

Mr Sofronoff now has an important advisory role, co-chairing a board with former District Court judge Julie Dick that is monitoring the laboratory's work and its policies.

They are there with other members of the board to protect victims of crime, to ensure the public and the government cannot again be lied to or spun by senior scientists entrusted with the critical work of finding incriminating evidence in crime scene DNA samples.

Professor Wilson-Wilde was one of the independent DNA experts who advised the Sofronoff Inquiry, and after its conclusion she was appointed chief executive of Forensic Science Queensland.

Before that, she was Queensland Health's choice when it wanted to do an internal review of the issues raised in Shandee's Story.

The Weekend Australian sat down with the new DNA chief, Mr Sofronoff and former judge Dick at the forensics headquarters





09 SEP, 2023

# The catastrophe called Project 13

Weekend Australian, Australia



Page 3 of 3

in Coopers Plains on Brisbane's southside.

"I don't believe the automated method and the manual method for Project 13 were comparable," Professor Wilson-Wilde said.

"The abstract was clearly contradictory to the body and the results of the project. Why that's the case, I do not know.

"I believe that project was flawed from the beginning. The report was insufficient and not fit for purpose to implement that method in its entirety.

"A change of that magnitude should have required a full validation, a full, in-depth project to study all aspects of the method to identify limitations, to optimise it thoroughly."



**Main picture: Shandee's mother, Vicki Blackburn and sister Shannah Blackburn with Kirsty Wright, centre; Shandee, above;**

LYNDON MECHIESEN

# THE AUSTRALIAN

Monday, September 11, 2023 | Today's Paper | Mind Games

## DNA lab staff 'raised concerns' about flawed method


### EXCLUSIVE

By **DAVID MURRAY**

NATIONAL CRIME CORRESPONDENT

and **HEDLEY THOMAS**

NATIONAL CHIEF CORRESPONDENT

6:20PM SEPTEMBER 10, 2023 •  1 COMMENT

A flawed DNA extraction method [blamed for the failure to identify the killer](#) of Shandee Blackburn in 2013 was implemented despite scientists raising concerns it was failing.

The new chief of Queensland's DNA lab, Linzi Wilson-Wilde, said former management decided in 2007 that the method could be introduced first and fixed later as pressure mounted over delays and backlogs.

"I believe that there were concerns raised by staff regarding the Project 13 method. The outcome was that Project 13 was implemented, regardless," Professor Wilson-Wilde said.

The comments came after independent [forensic biologist Kirsty Wright's](#) revelations in The Weekend Australian that a scientific report showed the lab knew the method was catastrophically failing to recover DNA from crime scene samples before it was introduced.

Project 13 tested the time-saving method of using robots to extract DNA – rather

than relying on scientists laboriously doing it by hand – on mock samples.

The Project 13 report's abstract or executive summary falsely and misleadingly stated that the results of the automated method were “comparable” to a manual method, and recommended its use.

In the body of the report, data showed the automated method recovered up to 92 per cent less DNA than the manual method and was 100 times less sensitive.

The disturbing discovery was not canvassed in the meticulous and dedicated work of [Walter Sofronoff's landmark inquiry](#) into the lab last year, and raises doubts about results in thousands more criminal cases including murders and sexual assaults

About 100,000 crime scene samples would have been processed using variations of the extraction method between its introduction in October 2007 and the end of its use in 2016, Dr Wright said.

Professor Wilson-Wilde, the newly appointed chief executive of Forensic Science Queensland, agreed the method was introduced before Cathie Allen took over as the laboratory manager.

“I think at the time there was a focus on turnaround times and implementing a robotic platform that had been purchased from government,” Professor Wilson-Wilde said. “My understanding is that the focus was on implementing the method and addressing the issues that were raised afterwards.”

Dr Wright and internationally renowned experts Jo Veth and Bruce Budowle discovered problems with the method in the final days of the Sofronoff inquiry.

It was used on almost all the samples of concern in the investigation into [Blackburn's vicious stabbing murder](#) in Mackay, including one from a fresh pool of blood that returned a result of “no DNA detected”.

A year's worth of data from 2012-13 showed the method was recovering four times less DNA than another extraction method used in the lab at the time, Dr Wright said.