



IN THE CORONERS COURT
OF VICTORIA
AT MELBOURNE

COR 2023 001322

FINDING INTO DEATH FOLLOWING INQUEST

Form 37 Rule 63(1)

*Section 67 of the **Coroners Act 2008***

Inquest into the Death of Carolyn Mary Wilson

Findings of:	Coroner Ingrid Giles
Delivered on:	9 September 2026
Delivered at:	Coroners Court of Victoria, 65 Kavanagh Street Southbank, 3006
Hearing date:	8 April 2026
Representation:	Ms Monika Pekevskia of counsel on behalf of the Chief Commissioner of Police, instructed by the Victorian Government Solicitor's Office
Counsel Assisting the Coroner	Ms Shirley Petrov, Senior Coroner's Solicitor
Keywords	Missing person; long-term missing person; alcohol misuse; reports of family violence; delay, centralised missing persons registry, NSW model

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INTRODUCTION

1. Carolyn Mary Wilson¹ was born on 18 July 1944 and was 56 years old when she disappeared on 17 April 2001. At the time of her disappearance, Carolyn lived in Somers, Victoria, with her husband, Ralph John Wilson (**Ralph**), and children, John William ‘Bill’ Wilson (**Bill**) and Marion Elizabeth Wilson (**Marion**). In 2026, Carolyn would be turning 82 years old. She has now been missing for over 25 years.

BACKGROUND

2. Carolyn was born in Melbourne to parents John (**John**) and Mary Pitt (**Mary**). She had an older sister, Prudence Janet Smith (**Jan**), and an older brother, John Maxwell (**Max**). After John’s death when Carolyn was 6 years old, Mary and the children moved to Mildura, where Carolyn was raised.
3. Carolyn moved to Melbourne and commenced a Bachelor of Arts (French and History) at Melbourne University, which she completed in 1965. In 1970, she completed her Diploma of Education, around this time also qualifying as a librarian.
4. Carolyn and Ralph met while they were both studying. Ralph was 15 years older than Carolyn and had previously worked as a merchant seaman before requalifying as a secondary school teacher. The couple married on 19 January 1973.
5. In 1978, Carolyn and Ralph relocated to New South Wales (**NSW**). Carolyn worked casually as a teacher and while living in Milton, NSW the family purchased a motel, which Carolyn ran while caring for their two young children.
6. Ralph recalled that around this time Carolyn began frequently drinking alcohol and that her drinking became more secretive. Ralph would find empty bottles of alcohol hidden around the home and noticed that Carolyn occasionally smelled of alcohol. Marion recalls that after Carolyn disappeared, she collected two boxes of bottles of wine and spirits which

¹ Referred to as ‘Carolyn’ throughout this finding unless more formality is required.

Carolyn had hidden around the home and garden. Carolyn was also a heavy smoker and would smoke around a pack of cigarettes a day.

7. While Carolyn's drinking became a frequent source of conflict in the family and *"family life at this time was very tense,"*² neither Bill nor Marion recall witnessing any family violence. Bill recalls that Carolyn *"would become argumentative when she had been drinking but [Ralph] was always pretty patient with her so there were never any heated arguments."*³
8. It was reportedly not unusual for Carolyn to take her bag and pillow and disappear for a few days after an argument.⁴ Similarly, Bill recalls that Carolyn would occasionally leave home in her car and stay away overnight, which he believes was due to her feeling *"guilty about the alcohol abuse"*⁵ however, she would always ring home and let Ralph know she was okay. On these occasions, she would not be reported missing, and she always returned home around two to four days later.
9. In August 1992, Carolyn was charged by police for driving while intoxicated. She was sentenced to pay a fine and court costs, and her licence was disqualified for a period of 6 months. In September 1993, Carolyn was involved in a motor vehicle accident in which she was the sole driver. She was charged by NSW police with refusing a breath test and was again sentenced to pay a fine and court costs.
10. In around 1994, the family moved back to Victoria and into a property that they had purchased in Somers. Around this time, they also purchased a property of around 200 acres⁶ on French Island (**French Island property**). On returning to Victoria, Carolyn continued working casually as a teacher at a number of schools and was working at Parkdale Secondary College at the time of her disappearance. Carolyn was very conscientious about her job and despite her drinking, she was careful not to miss any work.

² Coronial Brief (CB), letter from D/SGT Fauvel to MPU, pg. 83.

³ CB, statement of Bill Wilson, pg. 12.

⁴ CB, letter from D/SGT Fauvel to MPU, pg. 83.

⁵ CB, statement of Bill Wilson, pg. 12.

⁶ CB, letter from Sergeant Owen to Police Air Wing dated 11 July 2002, pg. 348.

11. In 1998, Marion attended boarding school, returning home on weekends and school holidays. She recalled that around this time, Carolyn's drinking had increased and when she would come home, the house would not be as clean as usual. On one occasion, Carolyn was intoxicated picking up Marion. Marion recalled that on this occasion Carolyn's *"driving was very dangerous and she was swerving over the road. I was frightened that she would have an accident."*⁷

Alcohol Treatment

12. On 15 February 1999, Carolyn admitted herself into the Westernport Drug and Alcohol Service Community Residential Drug Withdrawal Unit (CRDWU) for alcohol detoxification and to treat alcohol withdrawal. In her Independent Treatment Plan dated 16 February 1999, Carolyn wrote that she was entering the withdrawal program as *'life with alcohol had become unbearable for my family and dangerous for me.'*⁸
13. During her intake assessment on 11 February 1999, Carolyn disclosed:⁹
- a) *'twenty-five years of problematic drinking,'* commencing around the time she married Ralph;
 - b) drinking a bottle of sherry and half a bottle of red wine every day;
 - c) experiencing *'alcoholic blackouts'*; and
 - d) previously seeing a psychiatrist for alcohol use and depression, which she found unhelpful.
14. Carolyn also disclosed that she was sneaking sherry at night. She is quoted in the assessment notes as saying that Ralph *"knows I'm sneaking it... every 6 weeks he blows up at me in frustration and gets violent"*¹⁰ and that recently, Ralph *"was on a 4-wheel motor*

⁷ CB, statement of Marion Wilson, pg. 8.

⁸ CB, CRDWU patient records - Independent Treatment Plan, pg. 129.

⁹ CB, CRDWU patient notes – Assessment Form, pgs. 110 - 116.

¹⁰ Ibid, pg. 114.

bike and he tried to run me over and hurt me."¹¹ Carolyn was unsure whether she would return home after treatment.

15. In response to questioning during her intake assessment, Carolyn denied prior suicide attempts or self-harm and denied current suicidal ideation. Her risk level was assessed as - *'no current risk.'*¹² Medical notes taken during her inpatient treatment at CRDWU elaborate on Carolyn's state of mind during this period, including that:¹³

- a) Ralph was *'often violent towards her and (she) feared for her life when she states he ran over her with a 4-wheel motorbike.'*
- b) She is *'very ambivalent regarding her future and states she is fearful of leaving him, not because he would hurt her but because she is scared to start again.'*
- c) She was *'fearful of going home as she states she is frightened that one day her husband may kill her.'*
- d) She is *'very angry towards (her family) and drinks to cope with this.'*
- e) She felt that she needed to meet new people, as her only friends were Ralph's.

16. CRDWU practitioners provided Carolyn with long term rehabilitation options, so she could consider her future plans. Clinical notes indicate that she was considering these options.¹⁴

17. Carolyn completed the program and was discharged on 20 February 1999. She returned to home and did not discuss treatment with her family. Marion recalls that Carolyn was *"initially very quiet and seemed down and depressed."*¹⁵ Soon after she was discharged from treatment, Carolyn recommenced drinking.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid, pg. 113.

¹³ CB, CRDWU patient records – Medical Notes, pg. 126.

¹⁴ CB, CRDWU – Independent Treatment Plan, pg. 130.

¹⁵ CB, statement of Marion Wilson, pg. 8.

THE CORONIAL INVESTIGATION

18. On 10 March 2023, Marion wrote to the Court seeking to report Carolyn’s disappearance to the Coroner as a suspected death in order to, *inter alia*, obtain a death certificate for Carolyn, which was required in order to assist in the administration of certain aspects of her estate. Marion noted the difficulties that she had faced in navigating her mother’s disappearance. By this time, Carolyn had been missing for almost 22 years. On receipt of this correspondence, the Court requested that Victoria Police provide certain investigation documents and to furnish a request for an investigation into a suspected death.¹⁶
19. On 14 September 2023, a Family Checklist and DNA form was provided to Victoria Police officers to complete with Marion. This enabled the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine (VIFM) to undertake a comparison of the DNA provided against relevant databases, including DNA against the Victorian Missing Persons DNA Database, the National Missing Persons and Victims Systems, National Criminal Investigation DNA Database and the National Criminal Investigation DNA Database - Integrated Forensic Analysis.
20. On 7 October 2023, a Request for an Inquest (**Form 26**) pursuant to section 52(5) of the *Coroners Act 2008* (Vic) (**the Act**) was submitted to the Court by a member of the public who did not have a relationship with Carolyn. The request was made on the basis that an inquest would “*advance the investigation that is now 22 years old*” and that it was important that “*missing women are taken seriously.*”
21. On 3 November 2023, I was requested to take carriage of the investigation. I directed that further enquiries be made with Victoria Police to confirm whether any investigative steps were outstanding and for a Form 83A to be filed, which is a ‘Police report of presumed death to the coroner’. The Form 83A includes standard proof of life checks that are expected to be carried out by police members before reporting a long-term missing person to the Coroner as a suspected death, including checks of hospitals, bank records, phone records, Centrelink records, Medicare records, social media checks, obtaining of DNA from the missing person (if possible) and family members of the missing person.

¹⁶ The Court does not issue death certificates, which are issued by the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages.

22. On 10 June 2024, a standard Police Report of Death for the Coroner (**Form 83**) was filed with the Court. The Form 83 noted that Carolyn was a “*long time missing person believed to be deceased.*” On receipt of the Form 83, while it was not in the format required, I noted that a number of the required proof of life checks embedded in the Form 83A had been recorded in the text of the Form 83. I therefore accepted the report and commenced the coronial investigation into Carolyn’s suspected death.
23. Deaths that are reportable to the Coroner under the Act include deaths that are unexpected, unnatural or violent or result from accident or injury, and include, relevantly in the case of long-term missing persons, ‘suspected deaths’.¹⁷ The role of a coroner is to independently investigate reportable deaths to establish, if possible, identity, medical cause of death, and surrounding circumstances.
24. Surrounding circumstances are limited to events which are sufficiently proximate and causally related to the death. The purpose of a coronial investigation is to establish the facts, not to cast blame or determine criminal or civil liability.
25. Under the Act, coroners also have the important functions of helping to prevent deaths and promoting public health and safety and the administration of justice through the making of comments or recommendations in appropriate cases about any matter connected to the death (or suspected death) under investigation.
26. Victoria Police assigned an officer to be the Coronial Investigator for the investigation of Carolyn’s disappearance and suspected death, namely Detective Senior Constable Rohan Brock (**DSC Brock**) from Mornington Peninsula Criminal Investigation Unit (**CIU**), who conducted inquiries on my behalf and submitted a coronial brief of evidence on 13 March 2025.

¹⁷ Section 3 of the *Coroners Act 2008* defines ‘death’ to include ‘suspected death’. This means that coroners have jurisdiction to investigate whether a person has died, if the circumstances of the possible death fall within the grounds of a reportable or reviewable death. This frequently arises in the case of long-term missing persons (**LTMP**) cases. Whether or not the report of the LTMP case is accepted as a suspected death will be a matter for the Coroner to determine on the balance of probabilities.

27. This finding draws on the totality of the coronial investigation into the disappearance and suspected death of Carolyn Mary Wilson, including evidence contained in the coronial brief. Whilst I have reviewed all the material, I will only refer to that which is directly relevant to my findings or necessary for narrative clarity. In the coronial jurisdiction, facts must be established on the balance of probabilities.¹⁸
28. It is not mandatory under the Act for an inquest to be held into Carolyn's suspected death. However, in this instance, a request for an inquest was submitted to the Court pursuant to section 52(5) of the Act. I determined to exercise my discretion pursuant to section 52(1) of the Act to hold an inquest in this matter, which was held on 8 April 2026, noting the significant public interest issues at stake and that I considered an inquest would be of assistance to me in discharging my statutory functions.

MATTERS IN RELATION TO WHICH A FINDING MUST, IF POSSIBLE, BE MADE

Circumstances in which the suspected death occurred

29. On 9 April 2001, Carolyn and Ralph went to stay at the French Island property, returning home to Somers on 11 April 2001. There is no evidence that there was any conflict between Carolyn and Ralph during this trip, nor that anything out of the ordinary occurred. From the day after their return to the day of her disappearance, Ralph's diary entries note that Carolyn was drinking daily.
30. On 16 April 2001, Ralph's diary entry records that Carolyn was '*inebriated*'¹⁹ after drinking almost an entire bottle of brandy and that she slept on the couch. In the morning of 17 April 2001, Carolyn told Ralph that she was going to a chiropractor's appointment. Ralph asked her what she had to say about last night, to which Carolyn allegedly replied "*sorry*."²⁰

¹⁸ Subject to the principles enunciated in *Briginshaw v Briginshaw* (1938) 60 CLR 336. The effect of this and similar authorities is that coroners should not make adverse findings against, or comments about, individuals unless the evidence provides a comfortable level of satisfaction as to those matters taking into account the consequences of such findings or comments.

¹⁹ CB, Ralph Wilson's diary – Part 1, pg. 197.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

31. On returning from her appointment, Ralph noted that Carolyn asked him if he “*wanted her to stay.*”²¹ Ralph replied, “*only if she modified her secret drinking.*”²² Carolyn allegedly replied that “*I will take this as a no.*”²³ She took her pillow and handbag and left home in her vehicle, a Green 1997 Daewoo Cielo sedan (**the Daewoo**). Before she left, Ralph’s diary entry states that he asked her when she would be returning and that Carolyn responded, “*probably tonight.*”²⁴ There is no evidence that Carolyn has been seen since.
32. There was no further contact from Carolyn until 6:51pm on 20 April 2001, when Carolyn called the home phone from a public telephone located at the corner of Woolamai Beach Road and Vista Place, Cape Woolamai, Phillip Island. Marion answered the phone and handed it to Ralph, who spoke to Carolyn for 5 minutes and 37 seconds.
33. Ralph recalled that Carolyn said that she “*loved us all,*”²⁵ that she didn’t know when she would be returning, that she was “*too far away*”²⁶ to return home that night and that she had been sleeping in the Daewoo. When Ralph asked why she had left, she replied that she was “*castigating*”²⁷ herself. This phone call is the last time Carolyn was heard from, and there is no evidence that she has been seen or heard from since.

MISSING PERSONS REPORT

34. On 26 April 2001, nine days after Carolyn was last seen, Ralph contacted Hastings Police and reported to a uniform member that Carolyn was missing. On 2 May 2001, twelve days after Carolyn was last heard from and fifteen days after she left home, Ralph made a missing person report to an officer at Hastings Police Station. The police report states that Carolyn “*is an alcoholic and regularly passes out at the wheel of (the Daewoo) and that it is out of character for her to be away from work.*”²⁸

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ CB, Ralph Wilson’s diary – Part 1, pg. 193.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ CB, Leap Records – Sub Incident Summary Report, pg. 73.

35. I note that this description in the LEAP summary is somewhat distinguishable from the original handwritten Missing Persons Inquiries notes taken by the uniform officer at the time of Ralph's initial complaint, which state that Carolyn is "*an alcoholic and at times when she has 'difficulties' she rings (Ralph) and he picks her up*"²⁹ (emphasis in original), and that the officer "*is aware that in 1999-2000, she had a collision 'with something' and she passed out.*"³⁰
36. Internal emails between uniform officers similarly appear to indicate that officers were focused on Carolyn's alcohol misuse at the time of her disappearance and there is no evidence of urgent action being taken to ascertain her whereabouts. For example, an email between Hastings Uniform officers dated 2 May 2001 states:
- "If you look on LEAP, you'll se (sic) she's an alcoholic (with a \$14,000.00 credit limit individual account.) I just need to know if she's the one using the card, if it is then I have told her husband that's as far as I go. Police will take no further interest in the disappearance. I feel confident it is her using the card but I need to substantiate that."*³¹
37. On 2 May 2001, Carolyn's work colleague reported receiving a '*strange phone call*'³² from a man who said he was a teacher and wanted to speak with Carolyn. A uniform officer spoke with the principal of the school, who provided the teacher's name and confirmed that he and Carolyn had been '*associates*'³³ when they worked together. The officer requested that the principal make enquiries with staff and for the teacher to contact the police officer urgently. Police officers ran a LEAP check of the teacher's details, but it does not appear that this teacher contacted police, nor that officers spoke to this person or that he was otherwise investigated.³⁴

²⁹ CB, Missing Persons Inquiries, pg. 328.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ CB, Email between Hastings Police Officers dated 4 May 2001, pg. 258.

³² CB, Missing Persons Inquiries, pg. 329.

³³ CB, Leap Records – Sub Incident Summary Report, pg. 74.

³⁴ Records indicate that police searched for records of the teacher and note that he was to contact police urgently, but there is no indication that there was any contact with him until I requested that DSC Brock contact him in October 2025. In this discussion, the man said that he had never been employed as a teacher and did not know Carolyn.

FIRST PHASE OF POLICE INVESTIGATION – DETECTIVE SERGEANT RON FAUVEL

38. On 20 May 2001, the investigation was handed over to former Detective Sergeant Ron Fauvel (**D/SGT Fauvel**), then Officer in Charge at Hastings CIU. D/SGT Fauvel had previously met Ralph on 18 May 2001, when he had requested Ralph's consent to issue a press release regarding Carolyn's disappearance, which Ralph was initially reluctant to allow.³⁵ D/SGT Fauvel considered that initially Ralph *"did not want a media release done as he stated his wife had left him and he did not want to cause any embarrassment to the family."*³⁶
39. Ralph ultimately provided his consent for a media release on 22 June 2001. On 29 June 2001, 73 days after Carolyn was last seen, Victoria Police first put out a media release requesting anyone with information about Carolyn should come forward. Subsequent media releases continued to be released into Carolyn's disappearance over the years. These occasionally led to reported sightings of Carolyn, which would be investigated by officers and unsubstantiated. For instance:
- a) On 24 January 2003, there was a potential sighting of Carolyn at a market in NSW with a young girl.³⁷ D/SGT Fauvel spoke to Ralph, who could not see any NSW connection, particularly with a child.³⁸ Available records do not otherwise indicate that this sighting was investigated further.
 - b) On 18 June 2004, Jan contacted D/SGT Fauvel regarding a television segment about the town of Donald, which contained footage of a woman who resembled Carolyn.³⁹ This sighting was subsequently found to be unsubstantiated.⁴⁰

³⁵ CB, Memo from D/SGT Fauvel to Officer in Charge, Media Liaison Unit, pg. 343.

³⁶ CB, Letter from D/SGT Fauvel to MPU, pg. 84.

³⁷ CB, Email from NSW MPU to officer at Victorian MPU, pg. 319.

³⁸ CB, Leap Records – Sub Incident Summary Report, pg. 76.

³⁹ CB, Leap Records – Sub Incident Summary Report, pg. 77.

⁴⁰ CB, Letter by Danny O'Sullivan to Officer in Charge, Hastings CIU, pg. 43.

- c) On 8 September 2005, there was a potential sighting of Carolyn at a school in Queensland.⁴¹ This sighting was investigated and found to be unsubstantiated.⁴²

Investigation between 2002 - 2003

40. It appears that in January 2002, consideration was given to transferring the file over to the Homicide Squad. It is unclear why this did not occur, nor what were the reasons for this consideration. In correspondence to the Missing Person's Unit (MPU) dated 22 January 2002, D/SGT Fauvel reported that the police investigation to date included:⁴³
- a) Checking Carolyn's bank account and credit card records.⁴⁴
 - b) The Daewoo was flagged as 'wanted' and run through the Traffic Camera Office.
 - c) Checking with airlines.
 - d) Checking the pharmaceutical board for any scripts and Carolyn's Medicare card.
 - e) Canvassing Carolyn's friends.
 - f) Contacting "various"⁴⁵ alcohol rehabilitation facilities.
41. This correspondence confirms that as early as January 2002, D/SGT Fauvel was aware that Carolyn had attended an alcohol rehabilitation facility. It is not apparent why records of this attendance were not obtained, as these would have uncovered the family violence allegations and may have shifted the focus of the police investigation.
42. D/SGT Fauvel additionally summarised his view on Carolyn's disappearance:

"At this stage, I have kept an open mind as to whether she has left home to take up a new relationship and is being maintained by a person unknown or whether she has suicided. If this occurred I would think that the vehicle would have been

⁴¹ CB, Crime Stoppers Incident Report dated 8 September 2005, pgs. 82 – 85.

⁴² CB, Letter by Queensland Police Service to D/SGT Fauvel dated 26 September 2005, pg. 346.

⁴³ CB, Letter from D/SGT Fauvel to MPU, pgs. 82 – 85.

⁴⁴ While it initially appeared that there were a few transactions made shortly after Carolyn's disappearance, these were later identified as relating to a late processing fee for the chiropractor appointment Carolyn attended on 17 April 2001.

⁴⁵ CB, Letter from D/SGT Fauvel to MPU, pg. 85.

located unless the same is in a remote location. I have also considered foul play but there appears to be no motive for any financial gains from within the family.”⁴⁶

43. This appears to be the extent of documented considerations in the initial investigation as to family violence, or to any third-party involvement in Carolyn’s disappearance.
44. D/SGT Fauvel conducted regular patrols outside Carolyn and Ralph’s home in February 2002. He also conducted immigration checks, however, there was no evidence that Carolyn had left Australia.
45. D/SGT Fauvel sent a full report on the investigation to the Homicide Unit and spoke with them on 7 June 2002, who advised that Hastings CIU would have investigative primacy but that they would “*continue monitoring.*”⁴⁷ D/SGT Fauvel confirmed that all checks had been completed without any trace of Carolyn and that he could not locate any “*motive for foul play.*”⁴⁸
46. On 10 July 2002, in discussions with officers, Ralph ‘*mentioned*’⁴⁹ the French Island property and that the couple had travelled there days prior to Carolyn’s disappearance. On 12 July 2002, Victoria Police’s Air Wing unit searched the French Island property, but no evidence was uncovered.⁵⁰ The extent of this search is not detailed; however, it does not appear that a ground search of French Island or the property was conducted at this time. The dam on the property was also not searched at that time.
47. D/SGT Fauvel also spoke with the barge operator to French Island, who also looked after the French Island property. He confirmed that he had not seen Carolyn or her car since she disappeared and had otherwise not sighted anything unusual on the property, including in the caravan and shipping container on the property, since Carolyn’s disappearance.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Ibid, pg. 85.

⁴⁷ CB, Leap Narrative, pg. 90.

⁴⁸ CB, Leap Records – Sub Incident Summary Report, pg. 76.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

48. On November 2002, D/SGT Fauvel spoke with Ralph about advertising a reward for any further information. Ralph advised that he would contact officers *“when he is in a position to do so.”*⁵²

Private Investigator

49. In early February 2002, Ralph engaged private investigation firm Fraud Risk Solutions to assess further avenues of enquiry to locate Carolyn. Private Investigator Danny O’Sullivan (the **PI**)⁵³ conducted an initial assessment into Carolyn’s disappearance and wrote to Ralph with his initial assessment on 7 March 2002. On 14 August 2006, the PI also provided a written report to D/SGT Fauvel which outlines his recollections of the steps taken in his investigation.

50. The PI noted that on meeting Ralph he found that:

*“he was not really serious at all about engaging us for any substantial investigation and he would only agree to an initial assessment. This seemed odd, given his apparently good financial position and access to sufficient resources with which it appeared he could have easily funded a much more thorough investigation.”*⁵⁴

51. The PI’s investigation included:⁵⁵

- a) Two meetings and on-going liaison with Hastings CIU.
- b) Interviews with Ralph, Jan, Max, Marion and Bill.
- c) Canvassing industry contacts per banking, finance and mercantile agents.
- d) Enquiring with Victoria Police’s Missing Persons, Crime Stoppers and Media Liaison Units.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ At the time that he was engaged by Ralph, Danny O’Sullivan was employed as a Private Investigator at Fraud Risk Solutions. At the time of his correspondence to Hastings CIU, Danny O’Sullivan was employed at Box Hill CIU, Victoria Police.

⁵⁴ CB, Letter by Danny O’Sullivan to Officer in Charge, Hastings CIU, pg. 41.

⁵⁵ CB, Letter by Danny O’Sullivan to Ralph Wilson dated 7 March 2002, pgs. 33-34.

- e) Enquiring with the French Island property caretaker and the barge logbook keeper (as the barge was the only means of getting vehicles on and off the island).
 - f) Making two trips to French Island to conduct a physical search of the property, the caravan, storage container, inspecting a car dump site on the island and conducting an external inspection of a dam on the property.
 - g) Identifying, contacting and enquiring with the chiropractor⁵⁶ whom Carolyn visited on the date of her disappearance.
 - h) Enquiring with media and police rounds reporters.
 - i) Enquiring with vehicle passage on the Spirit of Tasmania, as Jan had noted that Carolyn had been to Tasmania previously, however, there was no record of Carolyn or her car travelling to Tasmania at the time of her disappearance.
52. Given that the PI was engaged by Ralph in February 2002, that the PI held two meetings with Hastings CIU and had ongoing liaison with them, and that he had conducted searches of the French Island property in February – March 2002, it is not clear why Hastings CIU only became aware of the French Island property around 5 months later, when Ralph mentioned it on 10 July 2002.
53. In the PI's discussion with Jan, she mentioned that after Carolyn's disappearance she found fresh looking flowers at their mother's gravesite, which had not been placed there by either her or Max. The PI recalled Jan blaming Ralph for *"what she described as a terribly difficult marriage with Carolyn and said he was the true cause of Carolyn's alcoholism."*⁵⁷ However, she did not recall any family violence and did not believe Ralph or any other party was involved in Carolyn's disappearance, suggesting that she thought it was more likely that Carolyn *"had simply gone into hiding and did not wish to be found."*⁵⁸

⁵⁶ I note that the evidence refers to this appointment being alternatively with a myotherapist and physiotherapist. Given Ralph's contemporaneous diary entries refer to this appointment being with a chiropractor, I consider it is most likely that this appointment was with a chiropractor and have referred to them throughout.

⁵⁷ CB, Letter by Danny O'Sullivan to Officer in Charge, Hastings CIU, pg. 42.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

54. In his discussion with Max, he told the PI that he had limited contact with Carolyn in the lead up to her disappearance, however, he had a “*sense of suspicion*”⁵⁹ about Ralph’s reluctance to involve the media with reports about Carolyn’s disappearance.
55. Ralph provided the PI with Carolyn’s bank account records. The PI established that a payment for \$48.00 which appeared on Carolyn’s bank card statement dated 26 April 2001 related to a delayed processing payment for a massage appointment with a chiropractor which Carolyn had attended on the morning of her disappearance to treat lower back pain.⁶⁰ The chiropractor did not recall anything unusual about the appointment or that Carolyn showed any outward signs of depression or that she was intending to leave her home.
56. The PI ultimately concluded that there were no remaining substantial investigative leads.

Investigation between 2003 - 2004

57. In around January 2003, records indicate that D/SGT Fauvel completed checks with multiple organisations and agencies, without success, including:
- a) The Australian Tax Office.
 - b) The Australian Federal Police.
 - c) The then Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, to identify whether there was any record of any international travel by Carolyn.
 - d) Medicare and Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (**PBS**).
 - e) Department of Education – I note that when making enquiries with the Department, D/SGT Fauvel states that he is preparing a full ‘finding’ for the coroner.
 - f) Banks.
 - g) Traffic Camera Office.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

- h) Peninsula Drug and Alcohol service.
58. In January 2003, Marion additionally located documents relating to Windana, which provides services to people experiencing alcohol and other drug harms, family violence, mental health challenges and social disadvantage. D/SGT Fauvel spoke with a staff member at Windana however, they did not have any records of Carolyn attending.⁶¹ D/SGT Fauvel conducted further checks of rehabilitation facilities in the area but was unable to locate any records that they had treated Carolyn. The extent of these checks, nor what rehabilitation facilities were contacted, is not detailed in the records.
59. On 31 March 2003, D/SGT Fauvel conducted a formal taped interview with Ralph to “cover all bases”⁶² and ensure that nothing has been overlooked. Ralph “denied any involvement with the disappearance.”⁶³ D/SGT Fauvel recalled that the interview did not yield new information, and predominantly recorded conversations between himself and Ralph.⁶⁴ This interview was not transcribed, and the tape appears to have been destroyed. No further information about this interview is available on the investigation file.
60. In August 2003, following the release of a further media release information, Crime Stoppers received information that a vehicle matching the Daewoo’s description had been found dumped on Skye Road, Frankston.⁶⁵ Officers from the Hastings CIU attended the location and observed that the car:⁶⁶
- a) Was burned and “*totally rusted out*,” without any visible original paintwork;
 - b) Was a three-door coupe/hatch;
 - c) Had a Victorian registration plate with a partially visible number ‘7’ and a visible number ‘9’ beside it.

⁶¹ CB, Leap Records – Sub Incident Summary Report, pg. 77.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ CB, Statement of DSC Brock dated 29 April 2025, pg. 24.

⁶⁵ CB, Correspondence from Sergeant Bernie Magee dated 19 August 2003 to MPU, pgs. 86 – 87.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

61. The vehicle was therefore considered as not a match for the Daewoo, which had the numberplate 'OFF067.' The Organised Motor Vehicle Theft Squad were contacted and advised that they would inspect the vehicle when commitments allow and would advise of the result of their investigations. It is unclear whether they attended and photos of the vehicle do not appear to have been taken.

Investigation between 2005 - 2010

62. In 2005, Ralph wrote to the Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police regarding the investigation into Carolyn's disappearance. On 21 April 2005, he received a response to this correspondence from the Officer in Charge of the Victoria Police Missing Persons Unit (MPU), and subsequently, on 10 May 2005, from the Assistant Commissioner – Crime.
63. The two responses are broadly similar and advise Ralph that the MPU has a responsibility to monitor all Long-Term Missing Persons (LTMP) cases and to investigate where there is a suspected homicide. In Carolyn's case, the MPU had limited but ongoing contact with the Hastings CIU, as due to the *"lack of evidence to suggest that Carolyn has been the victim of deliberate foul play, the investigation has remained the responsibility of the regional detectives..."*⁶⁷ The correspondence also confirmed that Carolyn's information, and that of the Daewoo, were recorded on a nationally linked database, and were displayed on the National MPU website.
64. On 22 April 2005 D/SGT Fauvel wrote to Ralph to advise that he was doing a full review of the file but has not received any new information.⁶⁸ In this correspondence he requested the full details of medical persons, including the name and details of any dentist that Carolyn used over the past few years. Of note, in May 2005, D/SGT Fauvel attempted to get dental records from Carolyn's dentist, however, the dentist had since closed, and records were unable to be obtained.
65. During this period of the investigation, D/SGT Fauvel would periodically review the file and re-conduct inquiries to identify any activity in relation to Carolyn following her

⁶⁷ CB, Letter from Simon Overland, Assistant Commissioner - Crime, Victoria Police to Ralph Wilson, pg. 36.

⁶⁸ CB, Memo from D/SGT Fauvel to Ralph Wilson, pg. 40.

disappearance. None of these inquiries produced any leads. In 2005, his notes indicate that “*all avenues have been done at this stage*”⁶⁹ and that there was no further information.

66. On 14 August 2006, D/SGT Fauvel wrote to Parkdale Secondary school to state that he is in the process of taking statements from people that knew and worked with Carolyn at the time of her disappearance. The statements were intended to contain “*background about her employment and how long she was known to the person and any reasons that may have been behind her disappearance.*”⁷⁰ A time was meant to be arranged if any staff were able to assist, however, no statements are located on the investigation file and it is unclear whether these statements were taken.

SECOND PHASE OF POLICE INVESTIGATION – OPERATION BELIER

67. In July 2009, Carolyn’s missing person file was requested by an officer from Operation Belier. Operation Belier’s mandate, as outlined further below, was to undertake inquiries to locate Carolyn and if the matter remained unresolved, to establish the best possible ante-mortem profile.
68. Operation Belier reviewed information reports and investigative summaries in relation to Carolyn’s LTMP file. Task force members additionally undertook inquiries that sought to locate Carolyn, identify potential candidates for reconciliation as Unidentified Human Remains (**UHR**) and locate viable sources of ante mortem biodata. In this case it was apparent that further investigation would be required.
69. Their initial assessment was that this was a suspicious disappearance, however this was rapidly reassessed as, in the absence of further information, “*there is no reason this should be classified as suspicious.*”⁷¹ Carolyn’s file was flagged as to remain ‘active’ until either Carolyn was located alive, her remains were discovered, or in the event remains were located in the vicinity of where Carolyn went missing.

⁶⁹ CB, Leap Records – Sub Incident Summary Report, pg. 78.

⁷⁰ CB, Memo from D/SGT Fauvel to Parkdale Secondary College, pg. 225.

⁷¹ CB, Leap Narrative, pg. 91.

70. On 14 August 2009, Operation Belier investigators held a meeting in relation to Carolyn's disappearance. Their primary focus was to collect DNA and other biological material to compare it against any located remains. This was consistent with the mandate of Operation Belier at that time.
71. On 8 September 2010, a LTMP Recommendation Report into Carolyn's disappearance was created by a member of the Operation Belier taskforce which contained a risk assessment tool. In the risk assessment tool, Carolyn was marked as a 'medium' risk, which meant that she was "*possibly facing some danger.*"⁷² This assessment was formulated in consideration of the following risks marked as relevant to Carolyn's matter:⁷³
- a) Likely to attempt self-harm or suicide.
 - b) Subject to recent family or relationship problems or recent history of family conflict and/or abuse.
 - c) Had been attending all previously scheduled appointments.
 - d) Suffering from a physical illness, disability or mental health problem.
 - e) Drug or alcohol dependent.
 - f) Subject to other unlisted factors which police consider should influence the risk assessment (these are not denoted).
72. As she was identified as a medium risk, the assigned investigator was to "*seek guidance from their supervisor and/or CIU and assistance from the Missing Persons Crime Theme Desk (MPCTD).*"⁷⁴ The evidence is not clear as to whether this guidance was received, or the nature of the guidance, and the section in the document marked for the supervisor's own risk assessment is blank.

⁷² CB, Missing Person Risk Assessment, pg. 327.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid. The Missing Person Crime Theme Desk was a centralised point that provided an objective and consistent risk lens over all missing persons that were reported in Victoria.

73. During the inquest, Insp Combridge gave evidence on the risk assessment tool. He outlined that the tool was a point-in-time risk assessment which took into account, based on information available on the file at the time, what was known about Carolyn's disappearance and the surrounding circumstances.⁷⁵ The risk assessment was designed to provide investigators with an understanding of the prioritisation of which investigations required escalation.⁷⁶
74. In his evidence, Insp Combridge noted that the risk assessment tool has changed since it was applied to Carolyn's LTMP investigation. If applied presently he opined that this would now elevate her to 'high risk'⁷⁷ given her "likelihood to cause self-harm or attempted suicide."⁷⁸
75. On 6 October 2010, on the basis of Operation Belier's LTMP Recommendation Report:⁷⁹
- a) the investigation was reassigned to Southern Region;
 - b) the file be periodically reviewed;
 - c) that ante mortem information, DNA reference samples and dental records be collected; and
 - d) that consideration is given to commencing inquest proceedings.
76. On this basis, DNA was collected from Bill and stored at the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine (VIFM), and family ante mortem information was further provided to VIFM on 16 December 2010. As siblings have the same mitochondrial DNA, samples were not taken from Marion.
77. On 17 March 2011, D/SGT Fauvel wrote to Detective Sergeant Butler in the Operation Belier Task Force to seek guidance on their recommendation that he consider an inquest in

⁷⁵ Transcript of evidence of Insp Combridge on 8 April 2026, pg. 55.

⁷⁶ Transcript of evidence of Insp Combridge on 8 April 2026, pg. 69.

⁷⁷ Note that high risk does not necessarily mean that a disappearance is suspicious. Categorisation of a missing person as suspicious would require investigation by the Missing Persons Unit attached to the Homicide Squad.

⁷⁸ Transcript of evidence of Insp Combridge on 8 April 2026, pg. 55.

⁷⁹ CB, LTMP Recommendation Report, pgs. 325-326.

Carolyn's case. He was advised that the decision to prepare an Inquest Brief was ultimately a matter for him, noting that in LTMP cases as there have been instances where persons have been found years later, the coroner wanted police *"to prove the person is deceased."*⁸⁰

DORMANT PERIOD IN THE INVESTIGATION

78. Carolyn's missing person file was allocated to Bass Coast CIU in March 2011 for investigation, before being returned to Hastings CIU in 2014. The file does not appear to contain any information regarding any investigative steps conducted during this period. Following the closure of Hastings CIU in October 2015, the file was reassigned to Mornington Peninsula CIU.
79. During this period, Police LEAP records show minimal action or investigation being conducted on the file during this period, with police officers occasionally recontacting prior witnesses⁸¹ and investigating any leads as they arose, all of which were found to be unsubstantiated.
80. In November 2018, profiles of LTMPs, including Carolyn, were screened daily on billboards around Melbourne CBD and outer suburbs, as well as featuring on Victoria Police's social media posts and relevant Victoria Police Eyewatch⁸² Facebook pages to increase public awareness.
81. On 29 January 2019, there was an unsubstantiated sighting of Carolyn in Argentina, which was later found to be unsubstantiated.

THIRD PHASE OF POLICE INVESTIGATION – DETECTIVE SENIOR CONSTABLE PETER TYLER

82. On 23 September 2020, Queensland Police reported a potential sighting of Carolyn, after an unidentified woman was admitted to Nambour General Hospital. While fingerprints

⁸⁰ CB, Email Chain between DS Butler and D/SGT Fauvel, pgs. 323 – 324.

⁸¹ For instance, on 2 January 2017, police officers contacted the French Island barge officer and confirmed that there had been no sightings of the Daewoo, or any other record of Carolyn, following her disappearance.

⁸² Victoria Police Eyewatch Facebook pages operate across a number of regions across Victoria. They are operated by Victoria Police and enable the local community to stay connected with local police, as well as keeping updated on crime prevention, neighborhood safety and local crime.

ultimately confirmed that this was not Carolyn, this resulted in DSC Tyler of the Mornington CIU liaising with Marion and conducting a comprehensive review of Carolyn's missing person's file.⁸³

83. DSC Tyler's review found that that Carolyn's investigation file "*did not contain statements, photographs, banking documents and tapes of interview.*"⁸⁴ On being unable to locate further documents he contacted D/SGT Fauvel, who confirmed that the file was as it had been when it was reviewed by Operation Belier prior.
84. DSC Tyler requested, and for reasons which are unclear, was denied access to D/SGT Fauvel's emails as pertinent to the inquiry. He was therefore unable to access some statements, banking and telephone records. It is unclear why DSC Tyler was denied access to emails relating to the inquiry; however, I note that access may have greatly assisted the investigation, particularly in circumstance where there are gaps in documentation relating to the first investigation.

'Proof of Life' Checks

85. As part of investigation, DSC Tyler performed comprehensive 'Proof of Life' checks, both in relation to Carolyn's maiden (Pitt) and married (Wilson) names, including with:
- a) The Australian Taxation Office.
 - b) PBS and Medicare.
 - c) Banks.
 - d) Traffic Camera Office.
 - e) VicRoads.
 - f) Department of Home Affairs.

⁸³ A Facial Image Comparison was done, which returned an inconclusive result, however, a subsequent fingerprint assessment produced a non-identical result.

⁸⁴ CB, Letter from DSC Tyler to Registrar, Coroners Court of Victoria, pg. 222.

- g) Department of Education – regarding Carolyn’s salary and her superannuation.
- h) Health Insurance Commission.
- i) Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages – Advised that Carolyn had not changed her name.
- j) Australia Post.
- k) NSW Traffic/Licence – returned Carolyn’s traffic offence as referenced above.
- l) Residential Tenancies Bond Authority – no records were found.
- m) Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade – advised that Carolyn did not a current or historic passport.
- n) Centrelink.⁸⁵
- o) Mornington Peninsula Shire – confirming that the only property owned in that location is Carolyn’s last known address.

86. These checks did not bring produce any relevant leads.

Further investigation

87. Throughout the course of his detailed and comprehensive investigation, DSC Tyler interviewed a significant number of witnesses and pursued a number of lines of inquiry in attempting to locate Carolyn or her remains. DSC Tyler additionally considered third-party involvement in Carolyn’s disappearance, including investigating persons who may have had some involvement in her disappearance. Given that these leads were largely circumstantial and did not produce success, they have not been detailed in this finding.

⁸⁵ Centrelink’s response stated that its database “*appears to show that (Carolyn) last contacted Centrelink in September/October 2009.*” I asked DSC Brock to comment on this inconsistency. In his further statement to the Court dated 22 March 2026, DSC Brock states that this information is evidently at “*odds with all other evidence*” and that in his view, this is a recording error by Centrelink who were contacted by Police during this period in investigating Carolyn’s disappearance.

88. In 2020, DSC Tyler took a DNA swab from Marion and requested that Crime ID construct a 20 year on face fit for Carolyn.
89. Marion also provided DSC Tyler with Ralph's diary from 2001 and a copy of Carolyn's Power of Attorney (**POA**) form dated 14 June 1983, which nominated Ralph as Carolyn's POA. She also signed an authority to release Carolyn's CRDWU records, which contained the disclosures of family violence. These appear to be the first time that family violence became part of the scope of the police investigation.
90. Searches of the police database did not reveal any recorded family violence incidents between Ralph and Carolyn. On 4 August 2021, DSC Tyler attempted to interview Ralph about the family violence disclosures, however, by this stage, Ralph was suffering from advanced dementia and had very little recollection of the time around Carolyn's disappearance. The discussion, while comprehensive, did not produce any further evidence or investigatory leads.
91. Twenty years after Carolyn's disappearance, on 25 May 2021, DSC Tyler arranged for a Police Search and Rescue team to search the dam on the French Island property, which was around 60 meters x 30 meters and 3 meters deep at the centre. No evidence was located.⁸⁶
92. Additionally, he arranged for officers to conduct a door-to-door canvass in the Frankston area, where the burned vehicle had been located in 2003. DSC Tyler noted that while police officers from Hastings CIU had attended the scene at the time and recorded their observations, they did not take any photographs or exhibits, nor did they appear to have checked the Vehicle Identification Number (**VIN**).
93. DSC Tyler stated that at the time *"the vehicle was excluded on the belief that Carolyn's car was a four-door sedan. Only recently has Marion stated that it was in fact a 2 door,*

⁸⁶ CB, Leap Narrative, pg. 94.

with a sunroof.”⁸⁷ DSC Tyler contacted the person who made the initial incident report and located the car, but they were unable to provide any further memories of the vehicle.⁸⁸

94. Additionally, DSC Tyler conducted a LEAP licence check and located an inactive licence in Carolyn’s name which linked to a Wonthaggi address. He spoke with the owners of the Wonthaggi property who could recall Carolyn being there with a man, however, this also did not eventuate any leads.
95. On 12 October 2021, DSC Tyler attended Carolyn and Ralph’s home in Somers with Marion for the purpose of taking photos. The house had been modified since Carolyn had lived there and there were no signs of any recent struggle or forced entry.
96. On 14 December 2021, DSC Tyler visited Carolyn’s friend in Mildura. She had last seen Carolyn in 1994 and recalled that she believed Carolyn seemed *“unhappy in her marriage.”*⁸⁹ She recalled that in 2003, Ralph came to see her and reportedly told her, inaccurately, that Carolyn had *“run away, that she had been charged with 5 DUIs, was an alcoholic and had been caught drink driving with children in the vehicle.”*⁹⁰
97. On 21 December 2022, DSC Tyler retired from Victoria Police. On this day, he sent an email to Marion thanking her for her assistance and stating that he had now *“exhausted all available avenues”*⁹¹ of investigation.
98. The missing person file was then re-allocated to DSC Brock.

FOURTH PHASE – THE CORONIAL INVESTIGATION

99. As noted above, Victoria Police reported Carolyn’s matter to the coroner as a suspected death through a Form 83 on 10 June 2024 and DSC Brock was assigned as the Coronial Investigator for the investigation. On taking carriage of the investigation, I directed for a

⁸⁷ I note that there is a minor inconsistency with this evidence, as the burned vehicle located in 2003 was a 3-door coupe/hatch which had been excluded on the basis that the numberplate did not appear to match the Daewoo. I consider that this inconsistency is likely due to DSC Tyler not having access to the complete investigation file and D/SGT Fauvel’s emails.

⁸⁸ CB, Leap Records – Sub Incident Summary Report, pg. 94.

⁸⁹ CB, Leap Narrative, pg. 95.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ CB, Leap Narrative, pg. 95.

coronial brief to be prepared. As part of my investigation, I also directed that DSC Brock provide a number of written statements to the Court.⁹²

100. On 13 August 2024, DSC Brock took a statement from Marion, Carolyn's daughter, in relation to her recollections of Carolyn's disappearance. Marion told DSC Brock that she did not know what happened to Carolyn, but that she believed that *"the most likely occurrence is that Carolyn has died. This could have been as a result of her alcohol affected driving or she may have taken her own life."*⁹³
101. On 9 August 2025, DSC Brock spoke to Bill, Carolyn's son, about making a statement and Bill completed and emailed his statement to DSC Brock on 11 August 2025. In his statement Bill discusses his memories of Carolyn going missing, including that he did not have any memories of family violence occurring in the home.⁹⁴ Bill similarly hypothesised that Carolyn was deceased. These statements from Carolyn's children are the first written statements that were taken by police in relation to Carolyn's disappearance.
102. On 31 January 2025, DSC Brock spoke to D/SGT Fauvel, who had retired from the police force, about Carolyn's disappearance. Due to D/SGT Fauvel's ill health, DSC Brock did not obtain a statement from him about the police investigation. D/SGT Fauvel advised that he could not add any further information to the investigation than he had recorded in his report or the Police LEAP narrative.⁹⁵
103. On 31 January 2025, DSC Brock spoke with D/SGT Fauvel in relation to the tape recording of his interview with Ralph. While he recalled conducting this formal interview with Ralph, who was formally cautioned, the interview was conducted as an aid to the investigation. He recalled that the interview was focussed on canvassing further avenues of investigation and identifying other potential witnesses. D/SGT Fauvel asked Ralph, *"as a matter or process,"*⁹⁶ if he had anything to do with Carolyn's disappearance, which he denied.

⁹² Dated 11 March 2025, 29 April 2025, 13 November 2025 and 22 March 2026.

⁹³ CB, statement of Marion Wilson, pg. 8.

⁹⁴ CB, statement of Bill Wilson, pg. 11.

⁹⁵ CB, Statement of DSC Brock dated 11 March 2025, pg. 18.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

D/SGT Fauvel confirmed that he had never investigated Ralph as a Person of Interest “*as there was no evidence to suggest his involvement*”⁹⁷ in Carolyn’s disappearance.

104. DSC Brock also inquired about the location of the tape-recorded interview he conducted with Ralph in 2003, however, D/SGT Fauvel did not know the whereabouts of the interview tape and confirmed that it had not been transcribed.⁹⁸ I also asked DSC Brock to enquire with the relevant Operation Belier taskforce members whether they could recall reviewing a Record of Interview with Ralph, but none of them were able to recall such a recording.⁹⁹
105. DSC Brock additionally asked DSC Tyler about the tape. DSC Tyler stated that he had made extensive enquiries about the whereabouts of the tape when he was conducting his investigation, which appeared to show that the tape had been stored with other tapes at Hastings Police Station and that the cassettes had been routinely kept for a period of seven years before being destroyed.¹⁰⁰
106. DSC Brock also inquired with the manager of Molecular Biology at VIFM¹⁰¹ who informed him that the reference samples from Marion and Bill had been received for DNA analysis and uploaded to the Victorian Missing Persons DNA database, with one also uploaded to the National Missing Persons DNA Database. There were no matches at the time of upload, however, the DNA profiles would remain on these databases until the event that Carolyn is found, or the samples are matched to any UHR.
107. As stated above, on 24 October 2025, DSC Brock contacted the person who had been identified in the LEAP notes as the person who had made the strange phone call to Carolyn’s work colleague in the days following her disappearance and who was a teacher and ‘associates’ with Carolyn. This person advised him that he had never been a teacher and was not aware of Carolyn.¹⁰²

⁹⁷ CB, Statement of DSC Brock dated 29 April 2025, pg. 23.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ CB, Statement of DSC Brock dated 13 November 2025, pg. 23.

¹⁰⁰ CB, Statement of DSC Brock dated 29 April 2025, pg. 25. At Inquest, DSC Brock gave useful evidence about the systems that exist now to promote good record-keeping, including the Interpose system – see Transcript of Inquest (T) T-28 line 28 to T-29 line 23.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² CB, Statement of DSC Brock dated 13 November 2025, pg. 26.

108. On reviewing Carolyn's Missing Person File, DSC Brock opined that he believes Carolyn is deceased, having most likely taken her own life shortly after her phone call home on 20 April 2001. DSC Brock formed this opinion on the basis that Carolyn:¹⁰³
- a) left home without any apparent planning;
 - b) had limited money and clothing with her when she disappeared;
 - c) was drinking and smoking heavily at the time of her disappearance and would have needed money to facilitate this, as well as to pay for food, petrol and accommodation;
 - d) had not accessed her bank account or any utilities or services; and
 - e) had not been heard from since her phone call on 20 April 2001, and that neither she nor the Daewoo had been seen since she left home on 17 April 2001.
109. DSC Brock considered that the evidence suggested that Carolyn's death was due to suicide as her *"drinking was increasing and possibly spiralling out of control."*¹⁰⁴ He considered that the reason that neither Carolyn's remains, nor the Daewoo have ever been located, is that Carolyn *"drove [the Daewoo] into a body of water such as a dam, river or into the ocean or bay. There would be numerous locations where this could have happened and her body not be recovered around the Phillip Bay area."*¹⁰⁵
110. DSC Brock opined that there was a lack of evidence to suggest that any third person was involved in Carolyn's disappearance or death, and that equally, there was a lack of evidence to suggest that her death was a result of an accident or natural causes in the circumstances where she and her vehicle would not be recovered.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ CB, Statement of DSC Brock dated 11 March 2025, pgs. 22-23.

¹⁰⁴ CB, Statement of DSC Brock dated 11 March 2025, pg. 22.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

EVIDENCE FROM INSPECTOR COMBRIDGE

Operation Belier Background

111. To assist in contextualising the evidence received as part of the coronial investigation, on 5 December 2025, I directed that a statement be obtained from Inspector Anthony Combridge (**Insp Combridge**), who was a foundation member of Victoria Police's Operation Belier (later named the Belier Task Force).
112. Insp Combridge also gave *viva voce* evidence at inquest, and was an impressive witness.
113. Operation Belier was initiated following the 2010 coronial inquest into the death of Matthew Bibby,¹⁰⁷ and subsequent recommendations from the then Office of Police Integrity. The scope of Operation Belier was to review Victoria's known UHR cases against known LTMP reports from 1960 – 2005 in an effort to reconcile the two, so as provide assurance that a LTMP was not one of the UHR cases that Victoria Police was aware of.
114. The initial scope of Operation Belier involved 420 LTMP and 44 UHR cases reported between 1 January 1960 and 31 December 2005. These dates were selected as follows:
 - a) In 1993, the then Assistant Commissioner, Crime at Victoria Police directed that all records of people reported missing prior to 1960 be expunged from the Victoria Police LEAP database; and
 - b) The Crime Command – MPCTD took over responsibility for all LTMP reports post 31 December 2005.
115. One of Operation Belier's initial actions was to audit all Victoria Police missing persons holdings and Coroners Court of Victoria records, including records held at the Public Records Office back to 1960. This identified that the true numbers were around 600 LTMP and in excess of 220 UHR investigations within the relevant timeframe. Throughout the

¹⁰⁷ CB, Statement of Inspector Combridge, pg. 197.

course of Operation Belier, investigators reconciled around 110 UHR investigations and resolved around 120 LTMP investigations.¹⁰⁸

Operation Belier review

116. In relation to Carolyn's LTMP's file, Insp Combridge outlined that the review undertaken by Operation Belier was two-fold:

- a) To undertake baseline inquiries to locate Carolyn, and if the file remained unresolved, to establish the best possible ante mortem profile¹⁰⁹ for comparison against UHR holdings; and
- b) To assess the appropriate categorisation of the investigation as either:
 - i. Category 1 – where the circumstances of the disappearance warranted referral to the Homicide Squad for further investigation (i.e. where homicide is the prevalent theory); or
 - ii. Category 2 – where the circumstances of the disappearance did not meet the threshold for referral to the Homicide Squad, and referral to a regional CIU member would occur.¹¹⁰

117. Insp Combridge advised that Operation Belier investigators “sought to both apply investigative effort to resolve the investigation and assist local investigators”¹¹¹ in sharing lessons learned from instances where LTMPs had been successfully located. During the inquest, Insp Combridge gave evidence that baseline inquiries undertaken would likely have included reviewing interstate jurisdictions for any records of persons with similar names and dates of birth to Carolyn and looking for any evidence confirming whether Carolyn was still in Australia, or if she had travelled overseas.¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ Evidence at inquest of Insp Combridge, T-48-49.

¹⁰⁹ For instance, through obtaining biological reference material, biodata and circumstantial material that could be used for identification.

¹¹⁰ CB, Statement of Inspector Combridge, pg. 199.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Evidence at inquest of Insp Combridge, T-51.

118. In regard to appropriate categorisation of the investigation, Insp Combridge considered the evidence of unreported family violence, which would not necessarily suffice to refer an investigation to the Homicide Squad. Instead, Insp Combridge opined that, as there was evidence Carolyn had called home following her disappearance, *“further investigation would be required to establish the identity of this caller, and whether there was then a further opportunity for an interaction between the deceased and her husband for any such assault to occur.”*¹¹³ He further considered that Carolyn’s *“state of mind and behaviour at the time of her disappearance is consistent with a level of suicidality.”*¹¹⁴
119. If presently assessed, Insp Combridge assessed that Carolyn’s disappearance would remain classified as ‘Category 2,’ meaning that Mornington Peninsula CIU would retain investigative primacy with support from the Missing Persons Squad.¹¹⁵

Assessment of the investigation

120. Insp Combridge opined that the investigation conducted by police into Carolyn’s disappearance was, overall, reasonable. However, he stated that the complexity of missing persons investigations gives rise to common issues seen in a number of LTMP investigations predating Operation Belier, including Carolyn’s. These issues relate to investigative ownership and primacy in non-suspicious missing person’s case.
121. Although there was no other area with remit for such investigations, the allocation of these matters to investigators at the CIU was frequently *“ambiguous.”*¹¹⁶ Insp Combridge considered that these LTMPs investigations continue to *“suffer carryover effects of sub-optimal initial action, absence of statements from witnesses and exhibits that have either not been collected or collected and disposed of.”*¹¹⁷
122. Insp Combridge noted that a lack of documentation does not necessarily mean a lack of investigation. Rather, the lack of documentary trail makes it challenging for subsequent

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ CB, Statement of Inspector Combridge, pg. 199; Evidence at inquest of Insp Combridge, T-70.

¹¹⁶ CB, Statement of Inspector Combridge, pg. 203.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

investigators to “*understand exactly what’s taken place*”¹¹⁸ and creates challenges in adducing what enquiries have been undertaken in an investigation. Insp Combridge considers that in Carolyn’s matter, effort has been applied to the investigation. However, this effort appears to have been “*biased initially towards location of Carolyn and not considered alternative outcomes (i.e. that location may be precluded by deliberate efforts of either Carolyn or a third party.)*”¹¹⁹

How the investigation would differ today

123. During the inquest, Insp Combridge was asked about how Carolyn’s investigation would have differed if she had disappeared at the present time. He gave evidence that there is now substantially more data that police are able to interrogate when a person goes missing.
124. In particular he noted that mobile phones are a primary source of intelligence for current investigations (both to determine a person’s movements on the day of their disappearance but additionally to identify other locations that they may have frequented regularly prior to their disappearance) and that additionally a person’s digital fingerprint, CCTV, Automatic Number Plate Recognition and tollway information are all information sources which can be used by police to knit together to try and identify potential locations to investigate.¹²⁰
125. These new information sources available to police can all assist with determining both a person’s movements on the date of their disappearance but also other locations which they may have visited frequently prior to their disappearance, as well as any other places of interest.
126. Further, during inquest, Insp Combridge was asked about the destruction of the tape containing the record of Ralph’s interview. He noted that Victoria Police’s current record retention policy remains largely unchanged to date and that if, after seven years, an interview doesn’t relate to what is categorised as a major crime, then it would be destroyed.¹²¹ However, he noted that with ongoing systems improvements, there is greater

¹¹⁸ Evidence at inquest of Insp Combridge, T-72, lines 12-13.

¹¹⁹ CB, Statement of Inspector Combridge, pg. 203.

¹²⁰ Evidence at inquest of Insp Combridge, T-65.

¹²¹ Evidence at inquest of Insp Combridge, T-73.

accountability for actions through record keeping in present investigations, meaning that as more records become digitised, the requirement for destruction of records will become less defensible. In his evidence during the inquest, I note that DSC Brock agreed with this and stated that today, the audio and file would be uploaded and saved within the Interpose file.¹²²

127. Insp Combridge additionally highlighted that until recently, there were no time frames for reporting suspected deaths to the coroner. As of September 2023, changes to the Victoria Police Manual processes now require that in missing persons investigations, Victoria Police officers:

- a) 30 days - transition to CIU primacy;
- b) 60 days - if not already commenced - ante mortem sample collection commences;
- c) 120 days - if not already finalised, a draft inquest brief be prepared (this serves a dual purpose as preparatory work for the reporting of the matter to the coroner and as an opportunity to review the investigation to date to ensure all relevant inquiries had been undertaken); and
- d) 180 days - If not already undertaken, report the matter to the coroner as a presumed death (unless there is significant evidence that the person is still alive and deliberately avoiding detection/recovery).¹²³

128. Insp Combridge gave evidence at the inquest that this new process would likely overcome the issues identified in the present investigation, as the process of compiling an inquest brief would involve seeking statements if they had not already been taken.¹²⁴

Inspector Combridge's opinion as to what transpired

129. Insp Combridge opined in such circumstances where neither Carolyn nor her car have been recovered after a considerable length of time, this *“adds weight to both the hypothesis that the Missing Person has suicided (likely by driving their vehicle into a body of water...) and to the hypothesis of involvement of a 3rd party (where the vehicle has been disposed of).”*¹²⁵

¹²² Evidence at inquest of DSC Brock, T-29.

¹²³ CB, Statement of Inspector Combridge, pg. 201.

¹²⁴ Evidence at inquest of Insp Combridge, T-56.

¹²⁵ CB, Statement of Inspector Combridge, pg. 203.

Insp Combridge's view is that while there is evidence to support both hypotheses, *"the evidence supporting suicidality is more cogent than that supporting the involvement of a 3rd party in the disappearance."*¹²⁶

130. While Insp Combridge considered Carolyn's recorded comments regarding family violence while she was an inpatient at the CRDWU, he assessed these against Ralph's means, motives and opportunity, and formed the view that this hypothesis is less plausible than one of either self-harm/suicide or misadventure/accident. In particular, while he considered the possibility of third-party involvement in Carolyn's disappearance, which would explain why the Daewoo has not been located, there is little evidence to support this theory. Ralph, being the only identified person of interest, had *"limited capability to carry out a fatal attack and then subsequently mask his involvement through disposal of the remains and the deceased's vehicle."*¹²⁷ There is also no evidence to support that another person was acting at Ralph's direction.
131. Insp Combridge opined that the most likely scenario is that Carolyn died on or after 20 April 2001 as a result of self-harm, and that while accident or misadventure are viable hypotheses, they are less plausible due to the Daewoo not being located.¹²⁸

Central Missing Persons Registry

132. In his evidence during the inquest, as well as in respect to the coronial inquest into the death of Veronica Green,¹²⁹ which was held before me on the same date as Carolyn's inquest, Insp Combridge was asked to opine on the utility of a Centralised Missing Persons Registry, noting that a centralised Missing Persons Registry already exists in New South Wales (NSW). I draw upon this in relation to Carolyn's investigation, given its relevance to the current circumstances.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ CB, Statement of Inspector Combridge, pg. 204.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ See Finding into Death following Inquest into the Death of Veronica Catherine Green (COR 2020 003186), delivered 9 September 2026.

133. Insp Combridge considered that the NSW Missing Persons Registry provides opportunities for its members to be guided in the execution of best practice responses to missing persons investigations. He noted that there is a missing persons coordinator in each police area command or police department in NSW, with this role providing an additional knowledge base for members to draw upon during the response, as an adjunct to the Missing Persons Registry.
134. Insp Combridge opined that NSW model is ‘best practice’ amongst all jurisdictions, and he noted that Victoria is the only jurisdiction in Australasia that does not have a centralised area of expertise to support frontline investigators with LTMP/UHR investigations. He noted that such a model had previously been explored by Victoria Police in 2021, although it was not supported at the time due to organisational resourcing priorities.¹³⁰
135. The proposal suggested housing the central registry within the Crime Command, with a proposed remit of:
- a) Review of missing persons daily through LEAP (within 72 hours of the report)
 - b) Escalation of high risk and suspicious disappearance reports
 - c) Advice on investigation processes
 - d) Coordination of data collection for the National Missing Persons and Victim System (absorbed from the Intelligence Collection and Liaison Unit)
 - e) Facilitate quality control over missing persons reports
 - f) Oversee milestone events for LTMP and UHR cases
 - g) Governance via State Tasking and Coordination on the contingent risk posed by LTMP/UHR investigations
 - h) Review and triage existing/legacy LTMP/UHR cases.

¹³⁰ As at the time, Victoria Police had diverted significant resources to the COVID-19 pandemic response and the Commonwealth Games.

136. As noted above, investigative primacy, quality control, assurance and governance all sit at the regional level. While recent policy updates have sought to bring consistency to the investigations, Insp Combridge noted the specific skillsets that are required to effectively investigate LTMP/UHRs. He opined that a central registry like the model that exists in NSW would be beneficial in the quality assurance space, in particular, during the initial phases of the investigation and when considering next steps in older investigations.
137. In his evidence during the inquest, Insp Combridge cautioned that this centralisation, while beneficial, would not be the “*panacea for all missing persons investigations*”¹³¹ and there will remain some missing persons cases that are unsolvable.
138. Insp Combridge noted that it may be argued that augmenting the resources of Victoria Police’s family violence response, or a more coordinated multi-agency approach to mental health may be a better resource investment to affect missing persons outcomes. He opined that these are ultimately operational decisions for Victoria Police. While the risk associated with missing persons investigations is demonstrable, arguably this is true of other areas of risk such as family and intimate partner violence, serious and organised crime, youth offending and responses to mental health.
139. I concur with Insp Combridge and note that it is not my role to determine how or where Victoria Police invests its funds. Nevertheless, as I did in my finding into the death of Veronica Green, I intend to recommend that Victoria Police implement a central Missing Persons Registry and use the NSW model to inform the design and implementation of their model.

¹³¹ Evidence at inquest of Insp Combridge, T-66, lines 22-23.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

140. Pursuant to section 67(1) of the *Coroners Act 2008* I make the following findings:

- a) the identity of the deceased was Carolyn Mary Wilson, born 18 July 1944;
- b) the death occurred on or after 20 April 2001 at an unknown location from unascertainable causes; and
- c) the death occurred in the circumstances described above.

141. Having considered all of the circumstances, I am satisfied to the requisite standard that Carolyn is deceased. I make this finding noting that despite many alleged sightings of Carolyn over the years, there has been no verified proof that Carolyn is still alive in the now twenty-five years since she last telephoned home on 20 April 2001, some three days after she initially went missing.

142. Numerous ‘proof of life’ checks have returned no positive results, including from contemporaneous checks in relation to DNA obtained from her children. Further, I am satisfied that there are currently no further avenues of investigation that would elicit evidence about the cause and circumstances of Carolyn’s death. In making this finding, I convey my sincerest sympathies to Carolyn’s family, who have held out some measure of hope for Carolyn’s return for over twenty-five long years.

143. However, in the absence of a body, on the evidence available to me, I am unable to be satisfied as to the exact circumstances or cause of Carolyn’s death.

144. While it is possible that Carolyn took her own life soon after she made her final phone call home on 20 April 2001, I am unable to be satisfied on the available evidence that she suicided. I am also not satisfied that the available evidence demonstrates that Carolyn was experiencing suicidal ideation prior to her disappearance. I note DSC Brock’s opinion that there was an escalation in Carolyn’s drinking and that this was “*spiralling out of control*,”¹³² which I accept was cause for concern and raised Carolyn’s level of risk.

¹³² CB, Statement of DSC Brock dated 11 March 2025, pg. 22.

However, given the chronic nature of her alcohol misuse, I do not consider that evidence of Carolyn's drinking before her death can allow me to be satisfied that she took her own life.

145. It is also possible that Carolyn died due to accident or misadventure, particularly as she had been drinking heavily at the time of her disappearance and there is evidence that she had been driving her car while intoxicated. However, as neither Carolyn nor the Daewoo have ever been located, I am not able to be satisfied that Carolyn's death was through accident or misadventure.
146. Finally, I consider that it is possible that a third party played a role in Carolyn's disappearance and death. In particular, there is evidence before me that Carolyn was fearful at some points of her husband Ralph, having regard to patient records from the alcohol detoxification facility records in 1999 that came to light in the police investigation in 2020, including the entry that Carolyn was *'fearful of going home as she states she is frightened that one day her husband may kill her.'*
147. In 2003, Carolyn's husband was interviewed in relation to her disappearance and denied any involvement. Investigators appear to have placed great weight on this denial. Relevantly, Carolyn's experience of family violence as reported to clinicians was not then known to investigators. I am therefore not satisfied that the disclosures of family violence were ever put to Ralph, and, as the records of this interview have not been retained, this question unfortunately remains unresolved. When taken against a background of Ralph's delayed report to police of his wife's disappearance and initial reluctance to participate in a media release to assist in locating her, the spectre of third-party involvement is clearly raised, but now remains unable to be resolved. This is a concerning gap which is likely to remain unfilled.
148. Ultimately, and despite holding an inquest and hearing *viva voce* evidence, and while noting the helpful hypotheses of investigators put forward in my investigation, I cannot make a finding on the balance of probabilities as to the cause or circumstances of Carolyn's death.

COMMENTS

Pursuant to section 67(3) of the Act, I make the following comments:

1. Unfortunately, and tragically for Carolyn's family, the initial investigation of her disappearance by Victoria Police had some deficiencies. In being primarily focused on locating Carolyn, I consider that the investigation did not adequately consider or investigate other possibilities as to her disappearance, such as that she may have died or come to harm in the early days following her phone call home.
2. I further consider it to be concerning that, *inter alia*: (i) no witness statements were taken until D/SGT Brock assumed carriage of the investigation; (ii) the recorded interview of Ralph Wilson from 2003 was misplaced or destroyed and is no longer available; and (iii) the evidence pointing to reports of potential family violence came to light so late in the investigation, at a point where they could no longer be adequately investigated. In particular, by the time that DSC Tyler spoke with Ralph in August 2021, he was suffering from dementia and any investigation into his potential involvement with Carolyn's disappearance was unable to be put to him.¹³³
3. Furthermore, Victoria Police did not appear to conduct timely physical searches of places where Carolyn could have disappeared with her vehicle, and where valuable evidence may have been located, such as searching on Phillip Island nearby where Carolyn made her last call home or conducting of a ground search of French Island. An Air Wing search occurred only on 12 July 2002, over a year after Carolyn went missing. Furthermore, the dam on the property was only thoroughly searched over twenty years after Carolyn's disappearance, on 25 May 2021.
4. I note that in the initial investigator's correspondence to the Missing Persons Unit dated January 2002, he expressed his opinion in relation to homicide as follows, "*I have also considered foul play but there appears to be no motive for any financial gains from within*

¹³³ I note in this connection the evidence at inquest of Insp Combridge that '*the primary success indicator for a missing person investigation is the level of initial action that's taken at the time we become aware that a person has been reported missing*' – see T-49 lines 28-31.

the family.”¹³⁴ I consider that this evidences a potential lack of understanding with regard to the prevalence of family violence homicides, which may occur in the context of coercive and controlling behaviour without any financial motive.

5. In addition, poor record keeping and storage practices by initial investigating officers appeared to hamper subsequent investigations into Carolyn’s disappearance. In particular, both DSC Tyler and Operation Belier taskforce members did not have access to all the investigative documents to assist with their own investigation. The inadequacies in record keeping practices are best exemplified by the fact that the tape containing the police interview with Ralph is no longer available, despite it containing key evidence which related to an ongoing police investigation.
6. It is also concerning that it took over twenty years for Carolyn’s case to be reported to the Coroners Court. While she appeared to have no relationship with Carolyn, the applicant for inquest in Carolyn’s case submitted that, from the information available to her, she was concerned at the lack of progress on the investigation after so many years and that ‘*it is important that missing women are taken seriously*’. I agree.
7. The timeliness of investigations into suspected deaths is of deep importance, not only due to the diminishing returns of gathering evidence long after the event – which Insp Combridge eloquently described at inquest as giving rise to ‘*manifest forensic unfairness*’¹³⁵ to witnesses – but to family members. Carolyn’s family have lived with the uncertainty of their mother’s fate for decades, and the ambiguous grief and loss that they have faced, has undoubtedly been amplified by the astonishing length of the investigation. Referring to the work of Emeritus Professor Dr Pauline Boss, **The Missed Foundation** describes that for loved ones of the long-term missing, the lack of clarity complicates and delays the grieving process, resulting in an unresolved, continual grief commonly referred to as ‘*unending not-knowing.*’ This enduring pain should not be compounded by delays of police, nor of Courts.

¹³⁴ CB, Letter from D/SGT Fauvel to MPU, pg 85.

¹³⁵ See T-56 line 27. *See also* evidence of DSC Brock at inquest, T-44, lines 23-25.

8. Having so commented, I must be careful not to hold the investigation commencing in the early 2000s to contemporary standards, which are underpinned by new policies and clear processes for reporting missing persons cases as suspected deaths, as Counsel for the Chief Commissioner of Police helpfully highlighted.
9. Further, I acknowledge the views of both D/Sgt Brock and Inspector Combridge that despite the deficiencies highlighted above, including issues with record-keeping, the investigation into Carolyn's disappearance was a reasonable one by then-applicable standards. Insp Combridge in particular opined that the failure to document investigative steps does not necessarily equate to it being a poor investigation, and cautioned against the outcome of an investigation being considered a measure of its effectiveness.¹³⁶
10. While I consider that the notion of retaining key evidence in an ongoing investigation is not a particularly novel concept, I accept that, even 25 years ago, there was a very different understanding of certain of the issues that appear to me now as an investigating coroner to be very much in the foreground of Carolyn's case, including the documented reports of family violence, given the elevated levels of risk this might give rise to. In so commenting, I accept the evidence of Insp Combridge that while Carolyn would now be considered a 'high risk' missing person, *'that high risk doesn't equate [to] suspicious [circumstances]'*.¹³⁷ In this regard, I make no adverse comment about individual officers involved in the investigation into Carolyn's disappearance, or the decision for the investigation to remain at a regional level, and note further that, at certain points, considerable investigative efforts were deployed.
11. Moreover, I am satisfied that if Carolyn went missing today, there would be more rigorous processes underpinning the investigation. The approach to missing persons investigations now is substantially different and greater tools are available to investigators to pursue investigative leads. I also note that the changes to how missing persons investigations are now undertaken which requires an inquest brief be compiled 120 days following a person's disappearance and notification to be made to the Coroner's Court after 180 days. These

¹³⁶ See evidence at inquest of Insp Combridge, T-72 lines 9-11 and T-66 lines 24-26.

¹³⁷ See evidence at inquest of Insp Combridge, T-71 lines 14-15.

changes would involve the timely taking of witness statements and obtaining medical records, which would have assisted investigators with better understanding evidentiary gaps and reviewing the direction of an investigation.

12. I am further confident that changes to the Victoria Police Manual processes underpinning long-term missing persons investigations, which now require a report to the Coroner at the 120-day mark, mean that fewer families will be waiting for answers for such a long period after their loved ones go missing. I consider the work over decades of Insp Combridge to have been invaluable in this respect, noting that he has worked tirelessly with his colleagues within Victoria Police and with other agencies such as the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine, as well as the Coroners Court itself, to ensure that there are robust processes and transparent milestones in place to support long-term missing persons (**LTMPs**) being reported to the Coroner as suspected deaths, where proof of life checks have yielded no evidence that a LTMP remains alive.
13. I am also heartened to hear that Victoria Police has made sweeping reforms to the way in which it approaches missing persons investigations in which a LTMP has faced family violence. I heard evidence at Inquest that police are better equipped to robustly investigate a LTMP's history of family violence in assessing risk, as well as in ensuring that any experience of family violence factors into ensuing investigations (including interviewing and investigating persons of interest in connection with the disappearance). While the present rates of violence against girls and women and ability of systems to respond appropriately remain an issue of deep concern to communities across Australia – and ought indeed to be treated as a national crisis – modern-day police investigations into LTMPs are far better placed to address the risk posed by a missing person's history of family violence and to better call into view the existence of any suspicious circumstances flowing from the actions of a violent partner or family member.
14. Despite these improvements, I have noted Insp Combridge's remarks at Inquest that there likely remain a number of outstanding historical LTMP cases that require report to the Coroner, that family violence investigations can be deeply complex, and that busy police members, who are often required to prioritise urgent frontline duties, would benefit from a

centralised LTMP registry within police to provide guidance and oversight of the same. While I understand that Victoria Police has not been well-positioned to consider this step in the past due to other resourcing demands, it ought to be the case that, post-COVID-19, this important proposal can be revisited to ensure that those whose loved ones go missing have the best possible chance at a timely, robust and appropriately-resourced investigation.

15. Remarkably, Victoria is the only jurisdiction without some kind of centralised missing persons registry. To this end, a pertinent recommendation will follow.

RECOMMENDATION

Pursuant to section 72(2) of the Act, I make the following recommendation:

- (i) That **Victoria Police** implement a centralised Missing Persons Registry and use the NSW model to inform the design and implementation of its model.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I convey my sincere condolences to Marion and Bill, Carolyn's grandchildren, her family, friends and loved ones who have been profoundly impacted by Carolyn's disappearance, and who have now spent over twenty-five long years searching for answers. Marion, in her moving impact statement to the Court, spoke of the profound and enduring impact that Carolyn's disappearance has had on her life and her need for closure. In particular, she referenced how the absence of any clarity regarding her mother's fate has prolonged her grief, leaving it unresolved for decades. I hope that this finding can bring some answers and even the smallest measure of closure, despite the unanswered questions that remain and in circumstances where Carolyn has not been found.

I thank DSC Brock for his excellent ongoing assistance as Coronial Investigator, for his helpful contributions to the later stages of the investigation, and for his attendance at Inquest.

I also thank Counsel Assisting, Shirley Petrov, Senior Coroner's Solicitor, for her exceptional assistance throughout the inquest, as well as the counsel and solicitors who represented the interested parties, and witnesses. I also acknowledge and thank the Court's Legal Services staff and Registry for the invaluable assistance and support provided throughout the inquest.

ORDERS AND DIRECTIONS

Pursuant to section 73(1B) of the Act, I order that this finding be published on the Coroners Court of Victoria website in accordance with the rules.

Pursuant to section 49(2) of the Act, I direct the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages to ensure that Carolyn Wilson's death is registered, with her cause of death listed as the following '1(a) *Unascertained*'.

I direct that a copy of this finding be provided to the following:

Marion Wilson, Senior Next of Kin

Bill Wilson, Senior Next of Kin

Chief Commissioner of Police (C/- Victorian Government Solicitors Office)

Inspector Anthony Combridge

National Missing Persons Coordination Centre, Australian Federal Police

The Missed Foundation

Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine

Detective Sergeant Peter Folkes, NSW Police Missing Persons Registry

Vikki Watkins, Applicant for Inquest

Detective Senior Constable Rohan Brock, Coronial Investigator

Signature:



INGRID GILES
CORONER

Date: 9 September 2026



NOTE: Under section 83 of the *Coroners Act 2008* ('the Act'), a person with sufficient interest in an investigation may appeal to the Trial Division of the Supreme Court against the findings of a coroner in respect of a death after an inquest. An appeal must be made within 6 months after the day on which the determination is made, unless the Supreme Court grants leave to appeal out of time under section 86 of the Act.
