

Johnson family: Remove inspector over her attack

Cold Case Detective lashes out

RICK FENELEY



Scott
Johnson

The brother of Scott Johnson is demanding the removal of a detective chief inspector from the investigation after she accused former police minister Mike Gallacher of improperly “kowtowing” to the family and seeking priority for the 1988 cold case.

Homicide Squad commander Mick Willing said on Tuesday that some remarks by Chief Inspector Pamela Young were “inopportune” given their timing on Monday night, hours after the State Coroner had ordered a third inquest into Mr Johnson’s fatal fall from North Head near Manly.

Chief Inspector Young, from the Unsolved Homicide Team, launched the extraordinary attack on Mr Gallacher on the ABC’s *Lateline* program, when she also placed weight on the 1989 coronial finding that Mr Johnson committed suicide – against the family’s belief he was pushed amid a spate of gay-hate murders in Sydney.

The dead man’s brother, Steve Johnson, an American IT entrepreneur who has spent about \$1 million on his own investigations, told Fairfax Media: “That she also maligns a NSW government official suggests to me she will stop at nothing to bury my brother’s case. Does her view represent the whole of [the NSW Police Force], or has she gone rogue?”

Mr Gallacher, who was police minister when Chief Inspector Young was assigned to lead the investigation in early 2013, denies he put undue pressure on the police, saying he merely asked them to look at evidence gathered by the Johnsons and help them “find answers to a tragedy that has possessed them for almost three decades”.

Chief Inspector Young said Mr Gallacher had called her to a meeting with the Johnsons the day after the ABC's *Australian Story* featured their campaign, and "I saw a lot of what I describe as kowtowing by the minister and his staffers to Steve Johnson in particular. I was amazed and incredulous."

Mr Gallacher had expected her team's resources would be made available to Mr Johnson while hundreds of other families also wanted answers. "They have loved ones, too ... Some are not as well off as others." She called the minister's intervention "absolutely improper" and said: "Victims are equal. It was very wrong."

The NSW Police Commissioner, Andrew Scipione, refused to comment, but Detective Superintendent Willing said Chief Inspector Young and her team had "worked hard on this case and conducted an outstanding investigation".

"Perhaps some of her comments were inopportune in light of the coroner's decision ... a decision that is fully supported by the NSW Police Force."

In court on Monday, John Agius, SC, for the Johnson family, said it was "beyond comprehension" that Chief Inspector Young's 445-page report for the coroner had devoted a great deal of time to the suicide theory when there was not a "skerrick of evidence" to support it. He said the family had put forward more than 50 persons of interest and five gangs or loose groups who were known to be bashing gay men in the area.

Inspector Young told *Lateline* her report contained "extra information" on the suicide theory but it was "offensive and not true" to suggest she had not investigated the other possibilities – accidental fall or murder.