

PRIVILEGED & CONFIDENTIAL**NSW Police – Johnson family allegations of contempt and defamation
02-3003-2143****Record of Interview with Georgina Wells**

DATE: 27 April 2015

PRESENT: Georgina Wells (**GW**)
Sophie Dawson (**SD**)
Nick Perkins

SD: We would like to go through the events chronologically and your conversations with Pam and discussions about the authority she had and discussions around risks or constraints

GW: There were a lot of assumptions made, which I will go through. A lot on of the conversations were over the telephone and I have no notes because I was at home.

I was told she was appearing a bit after 5pm and I was still shocked when I saw it. It was not what I was expecting. Pam contacted the Homicide Squad Commander. He contacted me and said Pam had let him know she was on Lateline and that Steve Johnson also spoke. I assumed it would be quick grabs only, along the lines of the media release.

SD: Can you tell us about your discussions with Pam in lead up?

GW: On Wednesday, 1 April I spoke with Pam and Mick Willing separately. She explained about the statement and that it would be good to get the information in the statement to the media ahead of time to allow it to digest. We knew the family had a copy of the statement and it had been pushing quite hard in the media. We thought for that reason we would bring a few journalists on board. I don't think we gave copy of statement, just a background chat regarding the contents of the statement.

SD: Is that something you usually do for Inquests?

GW: No. It was something Pam initially suggested. We thought it was a good idea due to size of the document.

SD: Was the understanding that the conversation was off the record?

GW: Yes, always off the record, with possibility of going on the record if the statement was released by the Coroner. But anything on the record I understood to just be along the lines of the media release ie. to welcome the Inquest.

SD: What were the exact terms of that conversation?

GW: The possibility of going on the record afterwards. The difficulty is you assume a DCI would understand that to mean that you can't sit down and do a 20 minute interview with Lateline. It is clear to most Police at on a Superintendent and up can do that without express permission

SD: Have you spoken to her since?

GW: Briefly last week. She said there was a bit of a misunderstanding regarding what was approved. She says it was approved. She is not a stupid person. She wouldn't take that as approved.

SD: Were there any discussions regarding contempt or being careful?

GW: No, because I honestly thought anything said would be just to welcome the Inquest.

SD: So an off the record detailed briefing then a very brief on the record?

GW: Yes.

SD: What was discussed on the 1st?

GW: That if we had requests as a result of the statement being released we would look at those at the time. There was no discussion that we would need to get approval etc, those were assumptions on my part. I never specifically said you need to come back and get approval. That was approved with possibility of on the record later.

SD: In subsequent conversations did she think that she had free reign?

GW: We didn't go into that specifically. It was very brief. I let her know there was a misunderstanding.

SD: Were there any conversations with Strath regarding what was approved?

GW: I spoke to him on the Thursday and went through what I had discussed with Pam and Mick Willing. I nominated Lorna Knowles and Dan Box. That was approved by Strath. We spoke about the possibility of on the record and how we would manage that, for example how to manage Rick Fenely. Strath was of the view that if we did go on the record we would need to be fair to everyone. But the main point was approving the backgrounder.

SD: When did Pam indicate she preferred Emma Alberici?

GW: I don't know when that was. I got sick on the Wednesday. I don't recall when she said that but it was definitely after speaking to Strath.

SD: The briefing by John Kerlatec and Mick Willing – who told you about that?

GW: John Kerlatec. They were meeting about something else and it included seeking approval to do the backgrounder.

SD: So you were off sick and arranged Siobhan McMahon to organise the backgrounder?

GW: Yes but she wasn't there. Pam requested no one sit it in. Pam organised the Emma Alberici backgrounder by herself.

SD: Were you involved in any discussions regarding not sitting in?

GW: I was off sick and on days off. Siobhan emailed me asking what to do. I said make a record of it. She also spoke to Strath who contacted Mick to say he wasn't happy about it.

SD: Was there anything about the Dan Box backgrounder?

GW: There was no one else there. I spoke to Dan Box subsequently and he said he found it helpful and that it gave him a better understanding of the case. He said he thought there was not much of a story in it. I thought that means it was a success for us.

SD: On the 13th did you have any conversations with Pam?

GW: No, we didn't speak at all on Monday until lunchtime. After the directions hearing we spoke by phone in relation to the media release. She said by the time she came out the media had all left because we had spoken about a door stop.

SD: Was there an express conversation regarding the terms of doorstep?

GW: Mick Willing had that conversation regarding the door stop. I didn't speak to her until afterwards. She said the media had left. Then she asked whether Dan box was doing a story. She said Lateline was doing a story. I assumed it was based on the backgrounder only. I contacted Dan (email provided).

SD: You thought the story would just be snippets welcoming the Inquest?

GW: I didn't know she had spoken to Lateline until I received a call from Mick Willing at 5pm. I thought it was just snippets. I sent an email to everyone but didn't make big deal because thought it would be quick grabs.

SD: When you saw Lateline were you shocked?

GW: When it started I was shocked she was in the studio because I was expecting it to just be a backgrounder.

SD: Using the backgrounder as an interview?

GW: No, I was expecting grabs. The backgrounder was off the record. Pam and I discussed it previously and she asked 'once the statement is released does the backgrounder become on the record?' I said 'no, there needs to be a separate interview'.

SD: So you were surprised to see her in the studio because you were expecting grabs?

GW: She did speak outside the Court to ABC I later found out. She didn't say she didn't speak to anyone outside Court – she said she didn't do a door stop. I'm not sure if she was being deliberately tricky. I didn't find out about the ABC news interview until a few days later. Strath was going through it all trying to work out what had happened and he said 'I've got vision of her outside the Court house'.

SD: Was it the case that you just didn't think about it regarding Lateline?

GW: I thought it would be just a few grabs that she hadn't told me about it. I didn't expect a sit down studio interview. She texted me and Mick Willing later in the evening to say her make up looked good. I said looking 'I look forward to seeing it'. Once I saw it I was speechless. I didn't contact her straight after.

SD: Had you worked with Pam a lot before?

GW: Over a few years but never anything like this. The Homicide squad is quite sought after the media due to the high profile of some of the cases.

SD: In past had she shown sound judgment?

GW: Yes. I thought there was nothing to be worried about. When an officer is a certain rank you give them certain freedom. A certain level experience gives you expectation it will be done the way it needs to be.

SD: Do you remind people about the media policy?

GW: Not really unless a specific thing comes up. You do a lot of training to get to that rank. A big part of that training is media. Media officers go and give lectures.

SD: Does that cover law or just demeanour?

GW: I'm not sure. I don't imagine it would cover law because the people giving it are not lawyers.

SD: Have you been to training courses on media law?

GW: I've just come back from maternity leave 6 months ago. I don't recall any media law training. I have been in public affairs since 2003 – but left in 09/10. We have had Sparke Helmore give quick lectures at training days but they are only for 1 hour and do not go into nitty gritty.

SD: Did they cover contempt?

GW: I don't recall. At that level contempt of court is well known so you do make a lot of assumptions.

SD: Did you talk about on the record?

GW: No but it was a long shot to take that as approval for what she did.

SD: You think it was a misunderstanding?

GW: My concern is I didn't convey it all clearly enough, but by the same token it is such a long stretch.

SD: So you think she was driven by her concerns about the public interest in the policy of allocating resources?

GW: Yes that was her motivator. She still believes she did right thing.

End of interview