# 2022 Special Commission of Inquiry into LGBTIQ hate crimes

Before: The Commissioner, The Honourable Justice John Sackar

At Level 2, 121 Macquarie Street, Sydney, New South Wales

Wednesday, 4 October 2023 at 9.30am

(Day 96)

Mr Peter Gray SC (Senior Counsel Assisting)
Mr James Emmett SC (Senior Counsel Assisting)
Mr Enzo Camporeale (Director Legal)
Ms Aleksandra Jez (Senior Solicitor)

## Also Present:

Mr Mark Tedeschi KC with Mr Anders Mykkeltvedt and Mr Mathew Short for NSW Police, Detective Acting Sergeant Cameron Bignell, Detective Sergeant Alicia Taylor and Ms Georgina Wells

Mr Murugan Thangaraj SC for Mr Michael Willing

Mr Ken Madden for Sergeant Geoffrey Steer

Mr Matthew Hutchings for Mr Stewart Leggat

Mr Darien Nagle for Mr John Lehmann

Ms Linda Barnes for Detective Sergeant Penelope Brown

Mr Jim Glissan KC for Ms Pamela Young

Mr Stephen Russell for Detective Sergeant Paul Rullo

Mr Chris McArdle for Ms Emma Alberici

Mr Peter Wood (Re application in relation to Mr Willing)

THE COMMISSIONER: The application made by Mr Willing to be excused to give further evidence is refused. On the evidence as a whole, I am not satisfied that there exists a reasonable excuse for him not to attend to be asked further questions.

I therefore direct that he attend this Friday, 6 October, at 10am to be asked some further questions, but that examination will complete on or before 1pm on that day.

I will publish, during the course of today, my detailed reasons for that outcome. They will be the subject of the current non-publication orders. Otherwise, Mr Willing will be here at 10 on Friday. I will now adjourn, thank you.

## SHORT ADJOURNMENT

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes.

MR EMMETT: May it please, I appear to assist the Commission.

THE COMMISSIONER: Thank you. Yes, Mr Tedeschi. Yes Mr Emmett.

 MR EMMETT: Commissioner, this is a hearing to receive documents recording communications between police officers in the Unsolved Homicide Team and family members or other interested parties in relation to the progress of particular matters through the triage and review process in the Unsolved Homicide Team.

As we will explain, it is appropriate to place those communications on the public record, together with the stated police position in relation to those communications.

 Before we do that, it is appropriate to set out the context. In October 2022, an issue arose concerning the suggestion that the Inquiry's work was diverting resources from day-to-day operations of the Unsolved Homicide Team. There was subsequently a discussion in open court and in correspondence in relation to that suggestion.

Recently, as we will explain, the Inquiry became aware that statements had been made to next of kin or other

interested parties to similar effect as the statements made in October 2022. That was of grave concern to the Inquiry, and the Inquiry corresponded with the police in order to understand the position.

You will recall correspondence received from Natalie Marsic, General Counsel of the NSW Police Force, on 18 October 2022, stating that it was time intensive to respond to summonses from this Inquiry and that the diversion of resources was impacting the day-to-day operations of the Unsolved Homicide Team, including live investigations and reviews being stalled.

You will recall subsequent correspondence dated 2 December 2022, in which Ms Marsic again indicated that other UHT investigations or reviews had been put on hold while relevant officers assisted in the context of this Inquiry.

At a hearing on 5 December 2022, after ruling on certain issues, you made a number of observations about this correspondence to Mr Tedeschi, including that it was frankly unacceptable to accuse this Inquiry of interrupting the proper police work in relation to unsolved homicides. You said you were willing to dismiss the allegation as a misguided and misconceived assertion by someone who may well have entirely underestimated the resources that the NSW Police need to perform their tasks. You stressed that it was inappropriate to suggest that this Inquiry in some way or other has interrupted proper police inquiries or proper police resolution of crimes.

At the beginning of the hearing on 13 December 2022, Mr Tedeschi communicated a number of matters, which he said the Commissioner of Police and her General Counsel had asked him to convey. They included that every effort had been made and would be made to comply as completely and efficiently as possible with any requests for information, assistance or summonses by you; that they understand the importance of your Inquiry and the significance of your report to the LGBTIQ community and to the community at large; and that both the Commissioner and her General Counsel had been made aware of your comments.

Mr Tedeschi said it was not anyone's intention to cause any offence to you and certainly not to place any pressure on your Inquiry.

In the first half of 2023, the Inquiry experienced a number of matters where large volumes of documents, which should have been produced in response to summonses last year, were produced late by the NSW Police Force. In an affidavit by Ms Marsic sworn 26 June 2023, Ms Marsic explained that in gathering documents responsive to the initial summons, it was the understanding of the Office of General Counsel team and the Unsolved Homicide Team officers involved that all responsive hard copy records would be identified by engaging with the CRRIM Team, that is, the Corporate Records, Records and Information Management Team.

We now know this assumption was mistaken. In fact, documents relevant to particular homicides may be stored in a number of different locations and you have received evidence about that on a number of occasions.

In relation to the documents produced late in June 2023, Ms Marsic attributed this to two further errors or oversights by those who were responsible for gathering material for summonses issued by this Inquiry. First, Ms Marsic explained that by April 2023, it became apparent to the teams working on the police response that investigative files may have been centralised and catalogued under other names than the names used to search for the documents last year. As a result, the police revisited earlier summonses. Further searches were conducted between 18 April 2023 and 14 June 2023, which led to further documents being produced to the Inquiry between 20 and 26 June 2023.

Second, Ms Marsic explained that on 1 June 2023, a member of the Unsolved Homicide Team identified boxes of hard copy files in a storage room responsive to summonses which had not previously been reviewed and produced. Responsive documents from the files held in that storage room were produced on 25 June 2023.

There have been matters in which documents were produced more recently than June 2023. They are being addressed separately in this Inquiry.

We now know that the problems with record keeping in relation to unsolved homicides in the NSW Police Force was well known to some senior people within the Force, at least after the circulation of Detective Chief Inspector Lehmann's memorandum dated 5 August 2016. Mr Lehmann said:

It is the legacies of the poor exhibit and record management practices of the past, compounded by the passage of time, that causes significant problems for the UHT today.

It appears that these problems were either overlooked, unappreciated or ignored by the persons who prepared the initial police responses to summonses by this Inquiry. It is fair to say that if those involved in gathering documents responsive to the initial summonses were not aware of the legacies of poor record management practices, they should have been so aware.

That they appear not to have been was regrettable, and it contributed to the time and cost incurred by the police in responding to summonses.

During her evidence on 13 July 2023, Ms Marsic gave evidence that in October or November 2022, three additional officers were allocated, as dedicated officers, to the Unsolved Homicide Team with a view to addressing resourcing concerns. She also explained that apart from the three who are dedicated to working on this Inquiry, the other 31 or 34 officers in the UHT were used on a surge capacity basis as needs required.

More recently, this Inquiry obtained copies of communications by members of the Unsolved Homicide Team to family members of deceased persons in relation to matters not being considered by this Inquiry. Those communications were obtained after a summons was issued for, among other things, records of communications between members of the UHT and relatives or next of kin of deceased persons which referenced the Inquiry.

When I tender those documents, I will ask your Honour to make non-publication orders in relation to them to avoid naming the matters in question. However, the substance of the communications are as follows. On 6 April 2023, Detective Inspector Warren informed a family member that commitments to the Inquiry were impacting the review of her matter. The family member was told that their matter had not been forgotten and it was a priority but that the

officer had had to direct their attention to this Inquiry which had impacted the time frame of completion of the review.

In relation to another matter, Detective Inspector Warren had a conversation with a family member on 27 April 2023. This family member was informed that the Unsolved Homicide Team had been impacted by this Inquiry since June 2022, which was said to have taken away the ability for the Unsolved Homicide Team to investigate consistently that family member's matter or other matters outside the scope of this Inquiry.

In relation to one matter, Detective Sergeant Hamill on 31 October 2022 wrote to a family member saying that he was working exclusively on that family member's case, which Detective Sergeant Hamill said was his only focus. Many months later, on 10 July 2023, Detective Sergeant Hamill wrote to the family member to inform them of the resource commitment required by Detective Sergeant Hamill and his team over the last six months in connection with this Inquiry. It will be observed that Detective Sergeant Hamill did not appear to think this Inquiry was distracting him or his team until the last six months, that is, the first half of this year.

On 25 May 2023, Detective Senior Constable Meredith sent a text message to a family member in another matter. Detective Senior Constable Meredith said:

 Our investigative capacity has been significantly reduced these past few months attending to urgent summons for a current special commission of inquiry into LGBTIQ hate crimes and we weren't able to get additional staffing to help us with these requests".

Again, it will be observed that Detective Senior Constable Meredith said the investigative capacity had been reduced these last few months, suggesting that she did not see her work as impacted in the second half of 2022.

More seriously, Detective Senior Constable Meredith appears to suggest that there was no additional staffing to help with requests from this Inquiry. That is contrary to Ms Marsic's evidence. The Inquiry does not know whether similar communications have been made to family members orally in other matters.

Such communications raise concerns for this Inquiry. Family members have strong and legitimate interests in the progression of their matters within the Unsolved Homicide Team. Their matters are obviously important, as is recognised by the NSW Police Force and by this Inquiry. Great care is appropriate if communications are made which might create a perception that those family members' matters are being deprioritised. That is serious, because it risks creating a sense of grievance or dissatisfaction. It would be highly regrettable if that grievance or dissatisfaction affected their perception of the work of this Inquiry.

The statements made by Unsolved Homicide Team members were also concerning because they present only a partial picture and one which could be regarded as misleading by To the extent that it has been resource omission. intensive to respond to summonses by this Inquiry, the evidence indicates that this was due to the state of the NSW Police Force records and to the inadequacy of the Police Force initial response to summonses last year. members of the public were to be told anything about a connection between this Inquiry's operations and other matters in the Unsolved Homicide Team, this full picture needed to be provided. It may have been more appropriate to say nothing about this Inquiry in communications with family members in connection with other cases.

 A substantial body of evidence before this Inquiry demonstrates that the Unsolved Homicide Team has been experiencing considerable delays in progressing matters and had been prior to the commencement of this Inquiry. The nature and extent of those delays have been canvassed at length in other submissions to this Inquiry.

On 15 September this year, Mr Camporeale of this Inquiry sent a letter to the NSW Police Force setting out the Inquiry's concerns with these communications to family members in other matters. The Inquiry also expressed concern at the possible implication that you, Commissioner, were not operating in accordance with paragraph (e) of the Terms of Reference, which requires the Inquiry to operate in a way that avoids prejudice to criminal investigations.

The correspondence also addressed summonses which had been issued in relation to the matters in which these communications were known to have been made. The Police Force resisted production of documents, which the Force contends are outside the scope of this Inquiry.

Despite refusing to produce records in response to a summons, police this morning provided some information, which may call for an explanation. That will be addressed separately in due course.

I should say, that information may be a matter for another day.

On 21 September 2023, Ms Marsic sent a letter in response which, in some respects, was not entirely satisfactory. In response to Mr Camporeale's statement that the Commissioner assumes the statements were unauthorised, Ms Marsic contended that this was not a matter for the Inquiry and did not inform the Inquiry one way or the other, whether the statements were authorised.

Ms Marsic also suggested that the statements would convey to an objective bystander that the NSW Police Force is supportive of the Inquiry. We submit that Ms Marsic's contentions in this regard should not be accepted, especially given the Police Force has resisted production of documents to enable you to understand the full context. And, of course, if similar statements were made orally, you have no idea of the tone with which such statements were made.

Nevertheless, Ms Marsic recognised two important matters. First, Ms Marsic stated the Police Force position that paragraph (e) of the Terms of Reference is not directed to ensuring that the Inquiry does not impact upon the resourcing of criminal investigations generally. We submit this position should be accepted. As Ms Marsic stressed, the allocation of police resources is a matter for the Police Force and not one for this Inquiry.

Second, Ms Marsic acknowledged that the progression of UHT or unsolved homicide matters since the commencement of this Inquiry, including at the present time, are a consequence of the allocation of resources by the NSW Police Force.

 It is important that these acknowledgments be placed on the public record. It should also be acknowledged that Ms Marsic in her letter gave an assurance responsive to a request in the letter of 15 September 2023, that within the next 48 hours, Unsolved Homicide Team officers would be advised that they are not to mention the work they are performing for the Inquiry in the context of communications with families of next of kin related to other Unsolved Homicide Team investigations.

The NSW Police Force has not yet informed you of what steps were taken to give effect to that assurance. It may be that Mr Tedeschi can address that now or obtain instructions to address it in the near future.

Separately, the statement by Detective Senior Constable Meredith suggesting that no additional staffing was allocated to the Unsolved Homicide Team to deal with requests by this Inquiry should be addressed and, if necessary, corrected. Ms Marsic's letter of 21 September was silent about that, despite its having been specifically identified as a matter of concern by Mr Camporeale. The NSW Police Force has not yet sought to explain or correct this, but should be given a further opportunity to do so.

Commissioner, those are our opening remarks.

THE COMMISSIONER: All right.

MR EMMETT: I'm now about to tender a bundle. Before I do, agreed non-publication orders have been made in relation to them. Can I hand up a form of that order.

THE COMMISSIONER: All right.

MR EMMETT: I'm sorry, Mr Tedeschi has not seen this order.

THE COMMISSIONER: Mr Tedeschi, do you need a moment to (a) consider it and (b) get some instructions?

MR TEDESCHI: I'd just like to carefully check this.

THE COMMISSIONER: All right.

MR TEDESCHI: Commissioner, my concern is that the table of redactions in paragraph 3 refers only to names and not

1 to any details of any steps that have been taken. 2 should include, we would respectfully submit, any of the information that has been provided, as I understand it, to 3 4 the Inquiry in recent days about those steps. 5 THE COMMISSIONER: 6 You mean to include a phrase such as 7 "any information concerning any investigation"? 8 9 MR TEDESCHI: Yes. 10 THE COMMISSIONER: 11 Or something of that sort? 12 13 MR TEDESCHI: Yes. 14 THE COMMISSIONER: Mr Emmett can take that on board. 15 16 17 MR EMMETT: Your Honour, the difficulty first, can I say, the information provided in recent days is not in the 18 19 tender bundle. The material that is in the tender bundle, 20 the police have been heard on that and have not before now 21 identified any specific matters that ought to be 22 redacted --23 24 THE COMMISSIONER: I don't think he is referring to the tender bundle, he is referring to the terms of the order. 25 26 27 MR EMMETT: I'm sorry. 28 29 THE COMMISSIONER: I'm happy to invite, at some point, him to suggest a qualification to the term of the 30 non-publication order which you can consider. 31 We can deal 32 with other matters in the meantime. I won't make any 33 orders for the moment, except it is clear that none of the 34 information in the tender bundle will be the subject of publication. 35 36 37 Would you like me to go off the bench for a few minutes to enable you to have that discussion? 38 39 40 MR TEDESCHI: Yes, just for a couple of minutes, 41 thank you. 42 43 THE COMMISSIONER: All right. I will adjourn shortly.

.04/10/2023 (96)

SHORT ADJOURNMENT

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Just let me know when you are ready.

MR EMMETT: Commissioner, can I hand up a version of the order with words added to item 4 of the table of redactions.

THE COMMISSIONER: Certainly.

MR EMMETT: That's agreed as sufficient to address the matters in the tender bundle, which is all that I'm seeking to tender.

THE COMMISSIONER: All right. Yes, thank you.

MR EMMETT: May it please.

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes, Mr Tedeschi.

MR TEDESCHI: Commissioner, could I begin by saying that the very significant and extensive resources that have been applied by the NSW Police Force to respond to this Inquiry with various requests, summonses, witness statements, inquiries, et cetera, highlight the positive approach and the very cooperative support provided by the NSW Police to this Inquiry and the importance that it ascribes to the work that the Inquiry is doing.

Those resources that have been applied have included over 188 summonses - responding to them; over 200 boxes of evidence produced; over 100,000 documents, both electronic and hard copy; the NSW Police have been involved in one form or another with the production of 45 witness statements; we understand that we're now up to something like 65 hearing days that the Commissioner's been represented; there have been 32 separate suspected homicides where there have been documentary tender bundles which have been considered and submissions made; and, Commissioner, to date, the estimated cost to the NSW Police is \$5.2 million, which we submit again indicates the degree of the Commissioner's support for the important work that this Inquiry is undertaking.

So far as the matters that were referred to by Counsel Assisting, in which family members were spoken to, we are able to inform you, Commissioner, that, firstly, in relation to each of those matters, there are, in fact, ongoing lines of inquiry, and we understand that you have been provided with some information about that on a confidential basis, for obvious reasons. But we can also

confirm that the head of the Homicide Squad, Detective Doherty, has instructed the members of the Unsolved Homicide Team that no further statements of the kind that have concerned this Inquiry are to be made, and that has been stressed as to its importance and as to complying with that direction.

Commissioner, there was reference made to one of those statements made to family members by a Detective Meredith. My instructions are that Detective Meredith was inadvertently in error in thinking that no additional staffing had taken place and that the assurance that was given to the Inquiry by Ms Marsic is in fact correct about additional resources being allocated to deal, on an ongoing basis, with the inquiries.

We submit that you, Commissioner, would be satisfied that there will not be any further statement made along the lines of those that have aroused your concerns, and Ms Marsic has indicated that in the most recent letter that she has sent to the Inquiry.

Is there anything further that I can assist you with?

THE COMMISSIONER: No, Mr Tedeschi, I'm going to make a few comments, because I think -I accept what you have told me unequivocally, and there is no need for me to say any more about what you have said. I accept what you tell me and I take that to be the view of your client.

The reason I was concerned, and members of the Inquiry were concerned, is because the remarks that are made clearly have the potential or tendency to denigrate this Inquiry in minds of members of the public, by one of perhaps two possible imputations. The first is that the Inquiry was behaving in some way unreasonably by making too many or multiple requests of the NSW Police and that, as a consequence of that, other members of the public who are grieving about their deceased relatives were, in effect, being told that they were taking, or had to take, for the time being, a back seat in relation to those homicides which this Inquiry is charged to investigate.

Now, the mere fact that members of the public might have gleaned from whatever the police officer was telling them that their cases had to be deprioritised or moved down the line because of this Inquiry did not confront a very real problem. The real problem is that all of the records, almost without exception, which each and every summons directed or lawfully directed the police to provide, were their own records. They were not asked to do any more than find a record or records that existed in relation to a case A or case B.

You knew - I don't mean you personally, but the police knew - from day one that there were two categories: category A which had nominated cases, and Category B which was unspecified, and that was always going to be a difficulty on the Inquiry's part and no doubt the police's part when those cases were identified. This has been said before in correspondence, but I have to say it again because the fact of the matter is, much of the cause of the extra resources and additional resources was either the belated or the ultimate realisation that your clients had to look in multiple repositories.

One of the documents that has been before the Inquiry, in the case of the murder of a judge, the murder of a judge's wife and other people, showed that documents which were crucial to that investigation were unlabelled and in a storeroom somewhere, and were found, according to Mr Lehmann's evidence, by chance many decades after.

Now, the fact of the matter is that one of the real reasons why extra resources have been needed is because these historic cases are obviously paper-based, almost without exception. We accept all of those things. tell people, as has been happening - I accept it won't happen again and I accept that Mr Doherty has intervened but for it not to have occurred to police officers or for the message not to have been passed down the line that one of the reasons why extra resources had to be diverted, as it were, is because half the time you can't be sure if you look in one place, you will find all of the holdings. why that is significant is this: it's not just the Inquiry; if the NSW Police Force genuinely wants to reinvestigate a case, it is plain commonsense that it must know where all its holdings are, it must know what exhibits it holds, it must know when it was last tested for DNA, it must know how many other reviews have been taken up.

I know I am preaching to the converted with you. You would be one of the most experienced senior counsel practising in criminal law in this country, let alone in

this State. So the need for the Force to be absolutely on top of their records goes without saying. It's not just this Inquiry. You might say in one sense - and I don't put this in any sense disrespectfully - we have caused the Police Force, in relation to the cases that we are interested in, to actually find out where their holdings are. They can now do genuine reinvestigations. They can now look at exhibits, some of which we have had retested for DNA, to see whether there are opportunities there for prosecution, and you know, as well as anybody else, that it's all very well to have a theoretical plan to reinvestigate, but if you don't know what your holdings are, you don't know where the exhibits are, you may or may not ever be able to prosecute.

So what I'm concerned about - it's past history now and I will leave it at that - I am concerned that these police officers, either through ignorance or otherwise, were not informed or were not told that much of the resources that were being utilised necessarily were to find their own records, and that's what is really unfortunate, that a half-baked or half-truth story was given to these relatives, I accept in ignorance, perhaps, that somehow or other their relative was not being given priority or the same priority that they might have thought had been given prior to this Inquiry commencing, because of the nature of this Inquiry. That is only half a picture.

Anyway, I accept what you say this morning. Let's make this the last time you and I need to discuss the issue.

MR TEDESCHI: Commissioner, all I can say is that we agree and share your frustration at the difficulty in obtaining historical records from 20, 30, 40 years ago, when there was what we now universally recognise was an inadequate storage system where hard copy documents that are critical to investigations have been stored in a variety of places, in a variety of names, and in a way that is not coordinated. Thankfully, there is now an electronic system which should make that situation completely different.

The Unsolved Homicide Team has struggled for years with the same difficulties that you and your Inquiry have struggled with, of trying to make sure that they have all the documents that are necessary for a reinvestigation, and as you have quite correctly said, how can you know whether

to conduct an investigation, let alone doing it, without the knowledge that you have all of the available material? That is why every effort has been made by the NSW Police during the course of this Inquiry to find the documents that you, Commissioner, have requested, because we appreciate the urgency and need for getting those documents. Sometimes, they have been found in the most bizarre places that could never have been logically anticipated, and they have emerged and we have provided them to you as soon as we've got them, albeit much later than when we would have liked to have provided them.

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THE COMMISSIONER: Mr Tedeschi, I accept that The point I'm trying to simply make, unequivocally. independently of this Inquiry, it is though, is this: chilling that the Unsolved Homicide Team has not, in a methodical or dedicated fashion, tidied up their housekeeping prior to this occurring, because they knew, at the very latest from 2016, with that memorandum signed by Mr Lehmann, countersigned by Mr Willing and others - they knew how crucial it was. Now, I do understand resources, but it is fallacious to have detectives sitting around a table devising reinvestigation plans if you don't know which witnesses are alive and dead, which witnesses have been spoken to and how many times, where the exhibits are for example, if the murder weapon has disappeared and can't be found, then those cases ought to be confronted and the public ought to be told in some way and somehow, candidly, if there are no ways to solve a problem, rather than suggest, if I may say, the mantra, "Unsolved cases are always open for solution". As a theoretical proposition that's true, but if you have no idea what you've got in your kit, you don't know whether you can ever revive some of these cases; you don't know how many DNA opportunities are sitting there waiting to be exploited, and you certainly don't know, for example, if your murder weapon has gone missing - and you would know better than anybody else - and you are light on persons of interest, then there are vital dots that need to be joined.

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I would have thought in any organisation, most importantly the Homicide Squad, who deals with life and death every day of the week, not to be right on top of those documentation issues - all I have done by making lawful requests pursuant to the directive given to me by Executive Government is to highlight the difficulties your client has, in a timely and efficient way, producing its

own records.

Anyway, having heard what you have had to say, I accept it unequivocally. May I just conclude by reminding you and anybody else - we will send out a message through the internet today - that Ms Young will start at 9 in the morning, and we will finish her tomorrow.

I don't know that you were in court this morning, or Mr Hodgetts was here - I have refused Mr Willing's application. He is directed to attend at 10am on Friday. But I have indicated that I will only allocate half a day, in other words, he will be completed between 10 and 1 on Friday.

MR TEDESCHI: Commissioner, I am concerned about your wish to restrict Ms Young to a day, because I anticipate that Mr Gray will probably take a considerable amount of time in chief with her. I think that my questioning of her would probably be about two hours worth and Mr Thangaraj may well be about the same, although I haven't discussed it with him. So it might be that we need to go into the Friday.

THE COMMISSIONER: All right. I hear what you say and I'm not unaware of the realities with her, given how the matter has developed. I will take on board what you have said. I would assume in any event that Mr Thangaraj would take some time, given what has been said. I will, at or about 9 in the morning, or beforehand, if I can, urgently look at whether I can allocate any further time, and if I can, I will let the parties know today.

Look, I won't say any more now, but I'm alive to the problem you raise, and I do understand the difficulties.

MR TEDESCHI: Thank you.

THE COMMISSIONER: All right. I will now adjourn, thank you.

AT 10.45AM THE SPECIAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY WAS ADJOURNED ACCORDINGLY

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