



**Statement**

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**Name** Helen Margaret Priestly  
**Address** 4 – 6 Cavill Avenue, Ashfield  
**Occupation** Senior Project Officer, Department of Family and Community Services  
**Date** 19 September, 2013.

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1. This statement made by me accurately sets out the evidence that I am prepared to give to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. The statement is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.
2. My full name is Helen Margaret Priestley. I am presently employed as a Senior Project Officer by Community Services, which is a division of the Department of Family and Community Services.
3. For the purposes of this statement, I have reviewed documents held by Community Services and by the Commission for Children and Young People ("CCYP") regarding a Working with Children Check conducted in relation to Steven Larkins. The information outlined in this statement is based on these documents and my recollection of that information, and my recollection and understanding of policies and procedures at the time. I have attempted to recall as much information as possible to the best of my ability.
4. Between 3 July 2000 and 12 March 2004, the Department of Community Services ("DoCS") (as it was then known) was an 'Approved Screening Agency' under the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*, which meant that DoCS was able to carry out employment screening in relation to employees who worked in child-related employment (known as a "Working with Children Check").

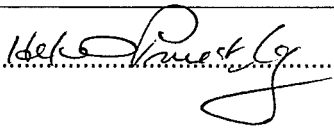
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5. At this time the Working with Children Check was a new process and I recall that the environment within the Unit was really positive, we were excited about the work we were doing to help protect children.
6. Between about May 2000 and July 2000, I was employed as the administrative coordinator in the screening unit. In August 2000 I commenced acting as a Risk Assessment Officer before being appointed to that role substantively in December 2000 in the screening unit within DoCS. In that role, it was my responsibility to conduct risk assessments for Working with Children Checks in accordance with the Guidelines issued by the Commission for Children and Young People. I was supervised by the Manager of the Unit.
7. Between about October 2003 and March 2004 I acted as the Manager within the screening unit.
8. On 12 March 2004, DoCS ceased to be an Approved Screening Agency, and I understand that DoCS and the Commission for Children and Young People ("CCYP") came to an agreement whereby the functions of the DoCS screening unit, and the staff employed in that unit, would be transferred to the CCYP.
9. Between 15 March 2004 and 4 March 2005, I was employed by CCYP as a Risk Assessment Officer, Working with Children.
10. In that role it was my responsibility to carry out risk assessments. My direct supervisor was Judi Teesdale, whose position was Co-ordinator, Working with Children. Ms Teesdale was supervised by Grant Marley, whose position was Manager, Working with Children. I did not supervise any staff. I was required to submit the outcome of all risk assessments to Ms Teesdale. I understand that Mr Marley was consulted by Ms Teesdale if a matter was complex. I did not have authority to notify an individual of the outcome of his or her assessment.

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11. Ms Teesdale, the other Risk Assessors and I met formally once per week to discuss risk assessments. These meetings were called Risk Assessors meetings and I would also approach Ms Teesdale informally at any time if I needed to discuss a particular matter.

**Mr Larkins**

12. On 10 February 2004, Mr Larkins wrote to me at the screening unit within DoCS. In his letter, Mr Larkins requested a review of the risk assessment which had been conducted by the screening unit within DoCS, and which had returned an overall 'medium' risk level in relation to Mr Larkins. I do not recall receiving this letter. A copy of that document is **attached** and marked "A".

13. I have been shown a file note which is dated 4 March 2004, relating to a conversation between myself and Mr Larkins on that date. I recognise the handwriting as my own. I accept, although I do not recall, that I spoke with Mr Larkins on that date regarding his request for a review of the risk assessment. That file note indicates that I advised Mr Larkins to provide evidence of courses undertaken and references from organisations mentioned in his correspondence, and I accept that I advised Mr Larkins to do so. A copy of the file note documenting this conversation is **attached** and marked "B".

14. On 7 March 2004, Mr Larkins wrote to me at the screening unit within DoCS, and enclosed a copy of his curriculum vitae, a number of personal references, and certificates and awards from qualifications held by and training undertaken by him. I do not recall receiving this letter. A copy of that document is **attached** and marked "C".

15. I have been shown a typed file note which is signed by me and dated 5 April 2004, and which contains information regarding Mr Larkins' request for a review of his Working with Children Check. That document refers to an annexure as "Tab A", however, the document which I have

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been shown does not include an annexure. I do not recall creating that file note. A copy of that document is **attached** and marked "D".

16. I have been shown a handwritten file note which contains entries for dates between 13 April 2013 and 23 April 2013. I recognise the handwriting as my own. A copy of that document is **attached** and marked "E".

17. Contained in the file note at attachment "E" is an entry which appears to have been written by me on 13 April 2004, in the following terms:

*"discussed Mr Larkins review w JT - Ring S Larkins*

*- resultant screening*

*- p/c Registrar N/castle."*

18. The reference to "JT" in that document is a reference to Judi Teesdale. I do not recall meeting with Ms Teesdale to discuss this matter. My reference to "p/c" is a reference to a telephone call.

19. Also contained in the file note at attachment "E" is an entry which appears to have been written by me on 14 April 2004, in the following terms:

*"discussed case again w Judi – Jackie.*

*- p/c to Steven Larkins – Stat Dec*

*- c/r does not belong to him*

*- his position is not in CRE and hasn't changed in last 12 mths.*

*- WWCC requested in error*

*- to be signed off by his supervisor."*

20. I believe that reference in that entry to "Judi" is a reference to Ms Teesdale, and that reference to "Jackie" is a reference to another Risk Assessor who worked with me at the CCYP. I do not

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recall meeting with Ms Teesdale or Jackie in relation to this matter. My reference to 'c/r' in that document means 'criminal records'; and my reference to 'CRE' means 'child related employment'.

21. Also contained in the file note at annexure "E" is an entry which appears to have been written by me on 15 April 2004, in the following terms:

*"Case discussed again at RA mtg".*

22. My reference to "RA mtg" is a reference to a Risk Assessors meeting. These meetings occurred once per week, as outlined above these meetings were attended by Ms Teesdale and all the other assessors to discuss current risk assessments. Either Ms Teesdale or Mr Marley would attend those meetings. I do not recall the Risk Assessors meeting held on that 15 April 2004 at which Mr Larkins' matter was discussed.
23. I have been shown a file note which is dated 24 May 2005, recording a conversation between myself and Mr Larkins on that date, relating to a request by me that Mr Larkins submit a statutory declaration regarding his position. I recognise the handwriting as my own. I accept, although I do not recall, that I spoke with Mr Larkins on that date. A copy of that document is **attached** and marked "F".
24. I have been shown a copy of a statutory declaration, declared by Mr Larkins on 26 April 2004 which was held on CCYP files, in which Mr Larkins declares that is not directly responsible for contact with the children in the care of Hunter Aboriginal Children's Services ("HACS"). I do not recall receiving this document. A copy of that document is **attached** and marked "G".
25. On 26 May 2004, CCYP received a letter signed by Mark Zaniol on the letterhead of Hunter Aboriginal Children's Services, which provided information about the nature of the position

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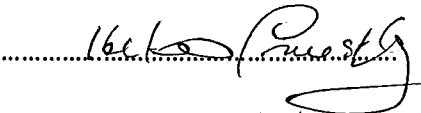
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which Mr Larkins held in that service. I do not recall receiving this document. A copy of that document is **attached** and marked "H".

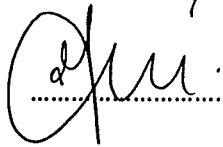
26. I have been shown a copy of an email which appears to have been sent by me to Mr Zaniol, and a reply from Mr Zaniol to me, dated 28 May 2004. A copy of that my email and the reply is **attached** and marked "I". I do not recall sending or receiving those emails.

27. I have been shown a copy of a letter from CCYP addressed to Mr Larkins and signed by Ms Teesdale on 16 June 2004, which advises Mr Larkins that the Working with Children Check in relation to him would be withdrawn. A copy of that document is **attached** and marked "J".

28. Although I cannot remember meeting with my managers in relation to this particular matter, I can recall the processes which were in place within the CCYP at that time. I was always required to meet with my manager to discuss the outcomes of risk assessments, and complex matters. All final decisions were made by my manager, I did not have the delegation or authority to make any decisions in relation to whether a Working with Children Check could be withdrawn.

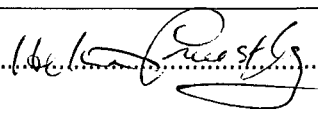
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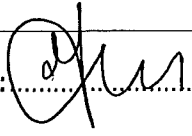
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