

## **SOLANO INQUIRY BY ADAM WALTERS**

The investigation started in late 2000 when an alleged victim, approached detectives at the then Child Protection Enforcement Agency (CPEA), part of Crime Agencies. He made allegations that his former swimming coach sexually abused him and other young boys in the 1960s.

Strike Force Solano was formed and was allocated adequate resources from the CPEA which consisted of detectives who were experienced in sexual assault investigations. The strike force investigation spanned approximately four months and up to 29 people, identified as either victims or witnesses, were spoken to and interviewed by detectives.

Despite the public appeals for victims to come forward that are used in other sexual assault investigations, Solano detectives did not need to take this tact as the victim had provided them with an extensive list of people who may have been involved, or could assist with police inquiries. Detectives were also provided with other names as part of their ongoing inquiries. Public appeals in historical sexual assault matters involving children are not standard procedure - the strategy for each investigation is based upon what is needed at the time.

In terms of "encouraging" other possible sexual assault victims to come forward, detectives who investigate these types of matters do so with the sensitivity and empathy that is required. In this matter, like many others of a similar nature, some of those interviewed simply did not want to give any information or be involved in the investigation as a witness or a possible victim. Generally, it is a highly personal decision for anyone to pursue criminal charges against those who have sexually assaulted them, whether historically or recently. Many prefer to deal with it through other courses of action, such as counselling. Others do not want to re-live the trauma at all. As detectives we always hope for an arrest as the outcome in any such investigation but that relies wholly on the evidence we receive.

It is not appropriate to reveal the identities of anyone interviewed. This brief of evidence was never tested in an open court therefore the information is not public. As well, this matter involves allegations of sexual assaults against children; there are privacy laws and state legislation protecting their identity. In any such investigation all victims, witnesses and their families are always offered counselling through health services - this case was no exception.

In regards to the outcome, Strike Force Solano sought advice from the NSW Police Prosecutions Branch at Crime Agencies on two separate occasions in regards to charges being laid. The legal advice was:

*".....that there is insufficient evidence to charge at this time in relation to the allegations made...the deciding matters in this case were the state of evidence. That is the age of the evidence, inconsistencies in the evidence and the failure of other victims to come forward. All of these matters were beyond control of the victims".*

Irrespective of the victim's willingness to testify, the case will not be re-opened for the reasons outlined, plus the alleged offender is now deceased.

**Detective Inspector Peter Yeomans**  
**NSW Police Force**