

Inquest into the death of Julie-Anne Leahy and Vicki Arnold

On 26 July 1991, Alan Leahy reported to police in Atherton that his wife, Julie-Anne Leahy, and her friend Vicki Arnold went fishing in the early hours of that morning and had not returned. Over subsequent days extensive searches were undertaken by police and others with no positive result.

Their bodies were discovered on 9 August 1991 in Mrs Leahy's four wheel drive at Cherry Tree Creek by youths riding trail bikes. Ms Arnold and Mrs Leahy cause of death was gunshot wounds to the head.

The then State Coroner, Michael Barnes, held the third inquest into the deaths of Ms Arnold and Mrs Leahy and delivered his findings on 1 March 2013.

The Queensland Government responds to recommendations directed to government agencies at inquests by informing the community if a recommendation will be implemented or the reason why a recommendation is not supported. Further information relating the implementation of recommendations can be obtained from the responsible agency named in the response.

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In his recent book, *Crucial errors in murder investigations*, Nobel prize winner Daniel Kahneman examines how police jumping to conclusions can miss vital evidence as a result of what he terms the 'theory - dependence of observations'. Mr Duhs' central thesis is that if investigators too quickly fix on or commit to a theory explaining a crime they risk failing to see evidence that may disprove it and are liable to subconsciously distort evidence they do find to make it fit into the framework of their favoured theory. I consider there are indications that happened in this case.

He recommends police services examine their detective training courses to assess whether they teach their officers rational criteria to equip them choose between contending theories and to continue to gather and analyse all evidence that might be relevant until it is shown not to be. Of course competing theories have to be abandoned as evidence disproves them but it is essential that not be done precipitously. I commend that recommendation to the Queensland Police Service.

Response and action: the recommendation is implemented.

Responsible agency: Queensland Police Service.

The detective training program curriculum and assessment (on-course and in the workplace) emphasises the need for objectivity, full disclosure and analysis of intelligence and evidence gathered through the course of an investigation.

More specifically, these elements are reflected in the learning objectives and assessment criteria of phase one 'conducting and managing investigations' and the investigation centre exercise component within phase three in the context of homicide investigation.

Further, a major component of the practicum assessment for plain clothes officers is assessed against complex criteria for the Advanced Diploma of Public Safety (Police Investigations) unit of competency 'managing specialist policing information'.

Consequently, the Queensland Police Service believes that its current training for all detectives and plain clothes officers adequately addresses the comment raised by the coroner in this instance.