

SUBJECT: Additional resources to support Forensic DNA Analysis during Commission of Inquiry

<input type="checkbox"/> Approved <input type="checkbox"/> Not approved <input type="checkbox"/> Noted <input type="checkbox"/> Further information required (see comments)	Signed..... Date...../...../..... Shaun Drummond, Acting Director-General, Queensland Health Comments:
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ACTION REQUIRED BY

24 June 2022, to ensure timely recruitment of additional scientists to support increased workload within Forensic DNA Analysis during the Commission of Inquiry into forensic DNA Testing in Queensland.

RECOMMENDATION

- **Approve** the establishment and funding of \$520,310 for 6.0 FTE temporary HP3 Scientists within Forensic DNA Analysis until 31 March 2023.
- **Approve** FSS to exceed its MOHRI cap by 6.0 FTE until 31 March 2023.
- **Approve** funding of at least \$55,000 in FY 2022-23 to meet the cost of consumables required to process an increased volume of samples through DNA analysis processes (for 6 months).
- **Approve** funding of \$78,800 in FY 2022-23 to meet expected overtime costs for Forensic DNA Analysis staff in the coming months.

ISSUES

1. On Monday 6 June 2022, the Queensland Government announced a Commission of Inquiry into Forensic DNA Testing in Queensland. The Minister for Health also announced at that time, that Forensic and Scientific Services (FSS) would also immediately remove the “insufficient DNA for processing” threshold, such that every sample would now be processed through to DNA profiling. This direction is in place until at least the completion of the Commission of Inquiry (report due by 13 December 2022).
2. Under this change, and based on 2021 sample volumes, it is estimated an additional 2,200 samples will need to be processed through to DNA profiling within a six-month period.
3. Without additional resources, this additional workload is estimated to increase the turn-around-time for sample processing from 2 weeks (current), to 3+ weeks. Over a period of six months, this would generate a backlog of up to 6-8 weeks’ worth of samples.
4. It takes 12 months to train a DNA scientist to competently report results, provide a Statement of Witness document and give court evidence, however recruiting staff for this purpose would not deliver timely assistance in managing the immediate additional workload created by the removal of the “insufficient DNA for processing” threshold.
5. As an alternative to full-capability training, it is proposed that FSS recruit 6.0 FTE HP3 Scientists to temporarily work across a limited number of tasks to target high-volume and ‘bottle-neck’ processes, allowing fully-trained scientists to remain focussed on core responsibilities. The training required for this type of work could be completed within 14 weeks of scientists’ recruitment.
6. It is proposed that the temporary HP3 resources be provided until 31 March 2023, to:
 - 6.1. allow for management of any enduring backlog created due to increased sample volumes;
 - 6.2. ensure investigation and prosecution processes are not hindered due to increased turn-around-times; and
 - 6.3. provide increased staffing capability (January–March 2023) to accommodate any significant changes that may be recommended by the Commission of Inquiry.

BACKGROUND

7. FSS is a comprehensive forensic, public and environmental health service facility that forms part of the Prevention Division within the Queensland Department of Health.
8. Forensic DNA Analysis provides a range of services for the Queensland Police Service (QPS) including:
 - 8.1. testing and analysis of biological samples from volume crime (crimes against property) and major crime scenes (crimes against persons) to generate a DNA profile;
 - 8.2. testing and analysis of person samples (also called reference samples) to generate a DNA profile.

9. The unit also provides assistance to the QPS and the Coroner's Court of Queensland with missing persons cases and victims of disaster incidents as required, as well as providing impartial expert evidence in all levels of the judicial system through prepared Statements of Witness and court appearances.

RESULTS OF CONSULTATION

10. The A/Director-General has provided verbal advice in support of the additional resources required to facilitate the removal of insufficient for DNA processing thresholds.

RESOURCE/FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

11. Forensic and Scientific Services is currently forecasting a deficit of \$3.9M in FY 2022-23.
 12. FSS has a MOHRI cap of 365 – there is no current capacity in this cap to accommodate 6 additional temporary Forensic DNA Analysis staff.
 13. The labour costs for 6.0 FTE HP3 Scientists from 1 July 2022 to 31 March 2023 would be \$520,310.
 14. It is expected there will be additional costs in overtime to allow scientists to manage increased throughput, particularly until new additional HP3 scientists are adequately trained. FSS is not funded for overtime costs. FSS is seeking a contingency of \$78,800 based on 50 hours of overtime per week for four months (until new staff are trained).
 15. Processing of DNA samples requires the use of specialised profiling kits (consumables). The cost to purchase sufficient kits to process the estimated additional 2,200 samples over 6 months is \$55,000.

SENSITIVITIES/RISKS

16. Forensic DNA Analysis services provided by Queensland Health are currently the subject of significant media and political scrutiny. There is a risk of significant delays in processing crime samples if additional resources are not secured for the duration of the direction to remove insufficient for DNA processing thresholds.

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