

STATEMENT OF ALICIA QUARTERMAIN

I **Alicia Quartermain** of Queensland Health at the Forensic and Scientific Services, 39 Kessels Road, Coopers Plains, state as follows:

Background

1. This is my second statement provided to the Commission of Inquiry.
2. My first statement, dated 21 September 2022, concerned the auto-amplification process adopted by FSS in June 2022 for samples with quantitation values between 0.001 and 0.0088 nanograms per microlitre.
3. This statement covers a range of other topics.
4. My qualifications and experience are set out in my first statement.

Inefficiencies in laboratory processes*Inefficient split between analytical and reporting scientists*

5. In my view, the split between analytical staff and reporting scientists and the associated tasks is not presently the most efficient use of resources.
6. If analytical staff were trained in case management, they could assist the reporting team when they have capacity. I believe this would be beneficial for overall efficiency of the laboratory. This is particularly so in circumstances where the analytical team does not have the same kind of backlog as the reporting scientists, given their testing takes a consistent amount of time. By contrast, with statement writing and DNA profile interpretation, each case can take differing amounts of time depending on the number and nature of the DNA profiles, the need for reworking, etc.

Inefficient case management of large cases (e.g. murders, etc)

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7. There is currently no formal process in place within the reporting team that allocates a large case (i.e. a case with 50+ samples) to one reporting scientist for its duration. As a result, in most instances many different reporting scientists are involved in interpreting separate samples in isolation from one other, without having the opportunity for a holistic approach to the case.
8. Further, when a reporting scientist goes to prepare a written statement for the case, they will have to review and consider all samples that have been interpreted by other reporting scientists. This would not be the case if a single reporting scientist had been responsible for managing and interpreting all samples from the beginning of the case. Occasionally there can be anomalies noted by the assigned case manager, such as potential DNA mutations, which can be recognised earlier if assigned to one reporting scientist, resulting in a reduced number of 'incorrectly' reported results requiring correction.

Turn-around time (TAT) measures

9. In my first statement, of 21 September 2022 I referred to turn-around times and their impact on the laboratory.
10. I am concerned by the process undertaken by QPS whereby turn-around times are measured on the basis of receiving 'cold links'. A cold link is the situation where the laboratory tests a crime scene sample, obtains an interpretable DNA profile, uploads this profile to the National Criminal Investigation DNA Database (**NCIDD**) and then gets a link with a profile recorded on that database. This process is usually undertaken in circumstances where the QPS have no alleged suspects and therefore have not provided any reference samples for comparative matching purposes.

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Witness

11. I am concerned because this method of interpreting turn-around times does not consider sample results which are returned but do not relate to a cold link, which in my experience, is a vast majority of FSS samples.
12. In my view, a more accurate measure of turn-around time would be obtained, as a matter of logic, by considering the majority of samples processed by the laboratory, not just a small proportion of them.
13. For example, a DNA profile which matches with a reference sample provided for the case is not a cold link, and is not considered in the turn-around time metric. Any DNA profiles that the laboratory obtains which match to a reference sample provided for the case are not cold links.
14. In my experience, these types of reference sample matches are far more common (because QPS are generally able to provide us with reference samples of alleged suspects and complainants) and are turned around to QPS more quickly than cold link results.

Cultural issues within the laboratory

15. The culture in the DNA Analysis Team is one where it is very difficult to raise an issue or have it addressed appropriately.
16. As scientists we should be proactive, innovative and find ways to improve what we're doing. When you take an idea for improvement to the person who has the ability to make a change within that process and they choose not to make that change, people stop raising things to them.
17. I also feel that if you challenge or ask a question about a decision made by management, you have a target on your back. There is a very high level of control over employees that

makes us feel like we're not trusted. This extends to working hours, flexible work arrangements, rules as to when we can call in sick, and access to stationery cupboards.

Management issues

18. In November 2020 I exchanged emails with Ms Allen regarding TAT and current sample list figures (i.e. samples requiring a finalised result). During that exchange, Ms Allen combined the total figures of a number of active worklists to reach a 'sample outstanding' figure of 3,247. However, in that calculation, Ms Allen added both the "Awaiting Review" worklist and "Pending Review – result" worklist to the figure, in circumstances where these two worklists are duplicates of each other, not separate lists of samples.
19. A copy of the email exchange with Ms Allen in November 2020 is **Annexed and Marked AQ-01 to this statement.**
20. Ms Allen's lack of understanding around the number of outstanding samples and how our work output KPIs are tallied concerns me. I am concerned because the emails that Ms Allen has sent to the DNA analysis staff outlining outstanding data is technically incorrect and causes concern within the reporting team.

Forensic register

21. In my experience as a reporting scientist, the Forensic Register is not a perfect system, but I am of the view that it is getting progressively better. The issues I have observed with the Forensic Register include:
 - (a) Slow operation;
 - (b) Auto-populate function does not work for a 4-person mixtures; and
 - (c) System time-outs.

Alicia Quartermain

Witness

22. Within the Forensic Register, QHFSS cannot 'data-mine' data and previous results. A request must be made to BDNA to data-mine in the Forensic Register. I was aware that this was a time-consuming process which BDNA charged the department for. Helen Gregg has since told me that it does not cost the department anything, and data-mining can be turned around within 24 hours if it is an urgent request. I was called to Ms Gregg's office to explain some scientific work that I had undertaken as a result of a Commission of Inquiry request for information. Ms Gregg suggested that it may be better in future if I request datamining is done to collect the information that I was after as a preference, over the work I had undertaken.

Conversations with Inspector David Neville

23. On 7 September 2022 I spoke with Inspector David Neville of the QPS. I spoke with him about my concerns regarding the process following the decision made on 19 August 2022. I have read the transcript of my discussion with Inspector Neville and confirm that it accurately states my concerns at the time.
24. I am aware as a result of our conversation, Inspector Neville sent a letter to Queensland Health requesting a pause on processing of priority 2 samples within the range of 0.001 and 0.0088 nanograms per microlitre.

I make this solemn declaration conscientiously believing the same to be true by and virtue of the provisions of the *Oaths Act 1867*.

TAKEN AND DECLARED before me at Brisbane in the State of Queensland this 6th day of October 2022.

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