

# Weiss Independent Review into Paul Reynolds

Interim report and progress update

January 2024

# Where to go if you need support

If anything in this report causes distress or triggers the need for support, the following services are available to you:

- **Lifeline** 13 11 14 or [lifelinetasmania.org.au](http://lifelinetasmania.org.au)
- **Tasmanian Lifeline** 1800 98 44 34
- **State-wide Sexual Assault Support Line**  
(Sexual Assault Support Service and Laurel House)  
1800 697 877
- **Relationships Australia Tasmania** 1300 364 277
- **Family Violence Response and Referral Line** 24/7 1800 633 937.
- **In an emergency, always call 000.**

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For current serving members of Tasmania Police and their families, Wellbeing Support is available at any time by calling 6173 2873 or email [wellbeing@dpfem.tas.gov.au](mailto:wellbeing@dpfem.tas.gov.au)

We respectfully acknowledge the Tasmanian Aboriginal people as the traditional owners of the land upon which we work and pay our respect to Elders past and present. We recognise the Tasmanian Aboriginal people as the continuing custodians of the rich cultural heritage of *Iutruwita* / Tasmania.

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# Foreword



**Regina Weiss**

Independent Reviewer

On 13 September 2018, former Tasmania Police officer Paul Reynolds died by suicide on Tasmania's north-west coast. On 1 September 2023, a Coroner's report was publicly released, finding that one of the most likely factors contributing to his death were allegations of criminal conduct on the part of Paul Reynolds in relation to children which had emerged and were being investigated.<sup>1</sup>

Subsequent to the Coronial findings and following recommendations made by the *Commission of Inquiry into Tasmanian Government Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Settings* (COI), I was briefed to conduct an Independent Review into Paul Reynolds (Independent Review).

Although the Terms of Reference do not seek an interim report, I have sought and obtained the agreement of the Tasmania Police Commissioner Donna Adams to provide her with an update on the progress of the Independent Review.

I do not presently see the need to seek any amendment to the Terms of Reference despite the offer to do so by the Commissioner.

In the two months since the Independent Review commenced private listening sessions, the level of uptake by participants who have voluntarily shared experiences and spoken their truth has been considerable. The courage and resilience of those participants, and their trust in the independence of the review process, are key to ensuring that positive change is possible.

To date, victim-survivors of Paul Reynolds and others, their families, observers, bystanders, former and serving police officers have stepped forward and shared their lived experiences – some incredibly painful – openly, candidly and without hesitation. For those forthright contributions I am grateful. I thank the intermediaries who have assisted me in building trust with victim-survivors, and the policing community, who have allowed me to spend time in their world for the purposes of this review.

It was clear from the outset of this Independent Review that Paul Reynolds' position as a police officer coupled with his involvement in sport through coaching and in administrative roles provided him with an ideal platform to groom and sexually abuse young males. This is not a new concept, with grooming and sexual abuse of young persons in sport reported globally and in Australia in recent years. To that end, I acknowledge the support I continue to receive from Basketball Tasmania, the AFL and the CEO of Sport Integrity Australia as the Independent Review progresses.

Finally, I thank Commissioner Adams and her team for the ongoing support she has provided me to date, all the while respecting my independence, and the invaluable assistance of solicitor Ms Demi Peters.

I encourage any person with information about Paul Reynolds to come forward and share their experiences as the review continues by contacting the confidential email address [submissions@weissindependentreview.tas.gov.au](mailto:submissions@weissindependentreview.tas.gov.au).

Anyone who wishes to be heard, will be heard.

<sup>1</sup> Findings, recommendations and comment of Magistrate Simon Cooper, published 1 September 2023, at [228] available at [https://www.magistratescourt.tas.gov.au/about\\_us/coroners/coronial-findings-2022](https://www.magistratescourt.tas.gov.au/about_us/coroners/coronial-findings-2022).

# Background

On 6 September 2018, Tasmania Police Professional Standards commenced an investigation into allegations of grooming and sexual abuse of teenage boys by then-Senior Sergeant Paul Reynolds. Before the investigation could be completed, Paul Reynolds took his own life, on 13 September 2018.

The findings, recommendations and comment of Magistrate Simon Cooper, published 1 September 2023 (coronial report) confirmed that those allegations of criminal conduct were a likely contributing factor to Paul Reynolds' suicide.

The Professional Standards investigation was closed shortly after Paul Reynolds' death and in 2021, Tasmania Police offered evidence in its possession relating to Paul Reynolds to the COI as a case study. The COI made findings relevant to their review of the material and witness statements provided.

The COI recommended (Recommendation 16.7) that Tasmania Police should:

- a. *establish a clear, publicly accessible process for reporting and responding to allegations of child sexual abuse against a member of Tasmania Police, including the ability to report to an entity independent of police such as the Integrity Commission*
- b. *expand the domestic violence review panel to cover child sexual abuse and ensure independence in investigations when a member is alleged to have been involved in child sexual abuse.*

On 6 October 2023, the Tasmania Police Commissioner announced that an Independent Review into Paul Reynolds was to be conducted. The objectives of the Independent Review can be found in its Terms of Reference:

- To assess the actions of Paul Reynolds whilst a serving police officer to determine if there has been criminal misconduct in his handling of matters reported to him or investigated by him during the course of his career.
- To enable victim-survivors or members of the community to report concerns regarding the behaviour of Paul Reynolds.
- To identify whether Paul Reynolds used his position as a police officer to groom young people and commit child sexual abuse.
- To provide appropriate support to any victim-survivor that chooses to come forward.
- To identify if there has been any misconduct by police officers involved in the investigation of any allegations against Paul Reynolds.
- To identify organisational learnings.

This interim report outlines the progress of the Independent Review and provides a brief overview of emerging broad themes and commonalities relevant to the scope of the Independent Review. The interim report will not provide intricate detail of the experiences and evidence of participants. These will appear in the final report and will be de-identified.

# Methodology

The findings and recommendations for the final report will be based on information and evidence from various and wide-ranging sources. This material is in the process of being gathered, reviewed and analysed.

The Independent Review has received and continues to receive written submissions and engage in private sessions with participants. The review and analysis of phone data, electronic files, Tasmania Police holdings, reports, hard copy files and archived material is ongoing and will continue for some months due to its voluminous nature and the extensive period of time it covers.

The Independent Review is simultaneously undertaking research and conducting comparative analyses to assist in forming the basis for recommendations in the final report. This includes analysis of national and international law enforcement agencies' processes and procedures aimed at preventing, reporting and investigating grooming and sexual abuse with a view to identifying best practice.

All interactions by the Independent Review with participants are approached in a trauma-informed manner, understanding that victim-survivors, observers and by-standers alike continue to be affected by Paul Reynolds' conduct, some many years on.

## Scope

Based on evidence gathered to date, the timespan of grooming and/or sexual abuse stems over a 30 year period from 1988 to 2018 and geographically extends from the west through the north-west and north of Tasmania, where Paul Reynolds served the bulk of his postings. As evidence continues to be collected, that timespan and geographical scope may widen.

## Confidentiality

As part of the informed consent process, anyone contributing to or participating in the Independent Review is advised that the information they provide will remain confidential, save for circumstances where there is a legal obligation to on-disclose information. For example, where there is a mandatory reporting requirement for suspected child abuse, or a concern about the immediate safety or risk of harm to a person. To date, one relevant disclosure has been made to Tasmania Police.

# Participation and engagement

A call for submissions was opened on 12 October 2023, initially until 30 November 2023. The period was then extended at the request of the Independent Reviewer and agreement of the Police Commissioner until 31 December 2023. Written submissions and requests for private sessions came through the [submissions@weissindependentreview.tas.gov.au](mailto:submissions@weissindependentreview.tas.gov.au) inbox.

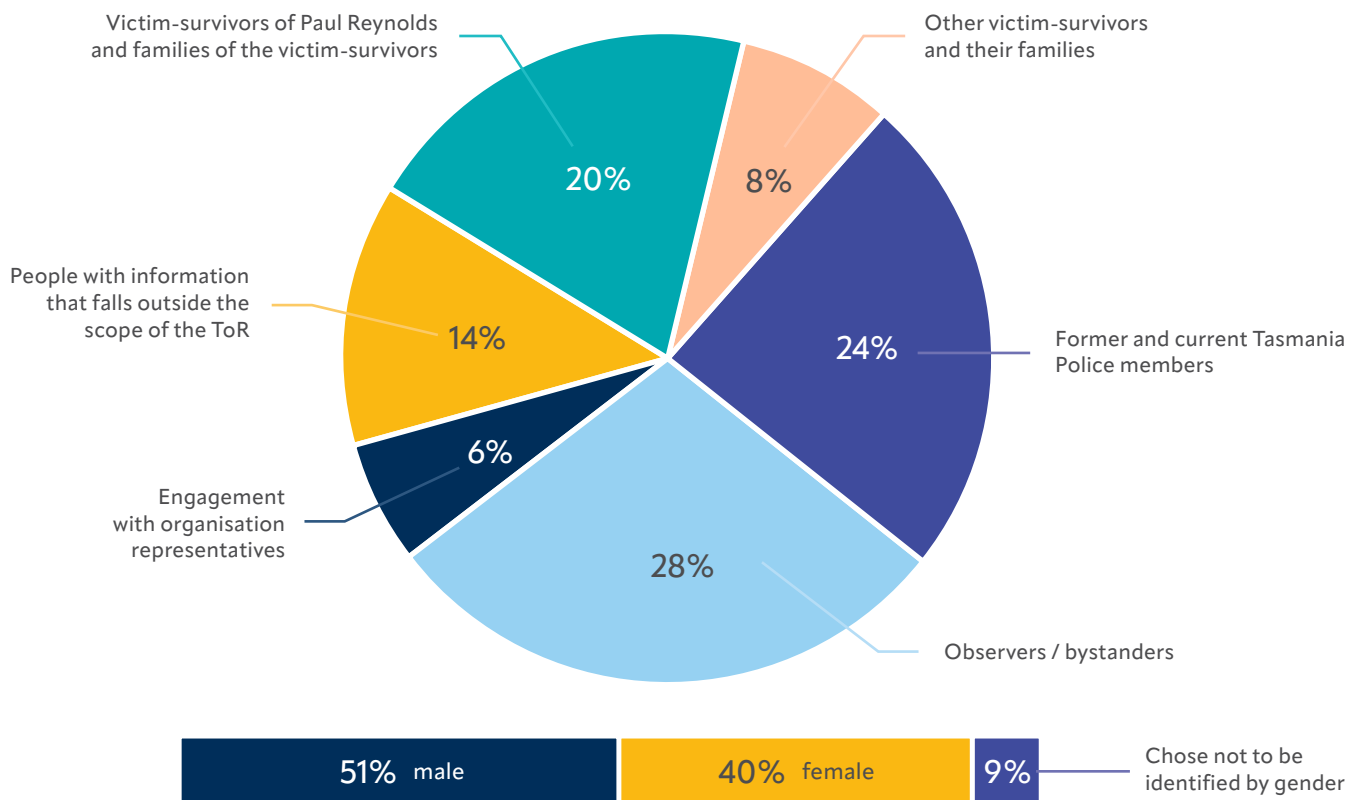
**This email address remains active and private sessions can still be facilitated.**

Some participants have chosen to participate by providing written submissions only while others have provided written submissions and taken part in follow-up private sessions. Others have preferred to participate in private sessions only.

The Independent Reviewer has also contacted and engaged with sporting and other organisations who supported progress of the review.

The final report will include full demographic data and non-identifying information about participants, noting that private sessions and interactions with participants will continue in the months following this interim report.

**FIGURE 1: Participant demographic data (to date)**



## Private sessions

At the date of this interim report, in-person private sessions have been conducted in Hobart, Launceston, Devonport, Deloraine and Burnie. More in-person private sessions are scheduled in those locations and others in the coming months. Private sessions are conducted in a semi-structured format wherein participants are encouraged to share their lived experiences, observations and insights about learnings, improvements, strengths and failings of systems and processes.

In person face-to-face sessions are the preferred and predominant way participants have chosen to share their lived experiences, observations and insights. They are conducted in a safe, confidential environment and are wholly voluntary. Participants are informed at the commencement of the session they are free to leave at any time and are not compelled to answer questions, noting that a trauma-informed approach is to provide choice and control to a victim-survivor when recounting traumatic events.

Participants are also informed that conversations and any notes relating to them are and will remain confidential unless they provide consent to on-disclose information.

A consent form is signed by participants at the commencement of private sessions, which details the voluntary and confidential nature of their participation.

In a small number of cases, private sessions have been conducted by video-link or telephone due to participant preference or where the participant has been located interstate.

## Support

Victim-survivors are offered access to trauma counselling and support services, which are listed on the inside cover of this interim report.

Victim-survivors are at different stages of trauma and many continue to suffer from its effects, as can their families and bystanders. The Independent Review is cognisant that some victim-survivors may choose not to participate directly in the review process but may nevertheless be affected by its publicity.

### **Anyone who needs support is urged to utilise the free counselling services.**

Former and serving police officers are able to access additional free confidential support and counselling services through the Department of Police Fire and Emergency Management Services wellbeing support program – [wellbeing@dpfem.tas.gov.au](mailto:wellbeing@dpfem.tas.gov.au) or (03) 6173 2188.

## Next steps

Private sessions are scheduled for the end of January with further sessions planned from February to April in the north-west, north and south of Tasmania in addition to videolink sessions with persons located interstate. Participants will be persons who have made contact either independently or through intermediaries and persons approached by the Independent Reviewer.

The future participants will include victim-survivors and observers, former and currently serving police officers, representatives of law enforcement organisations and other relevant organisations.



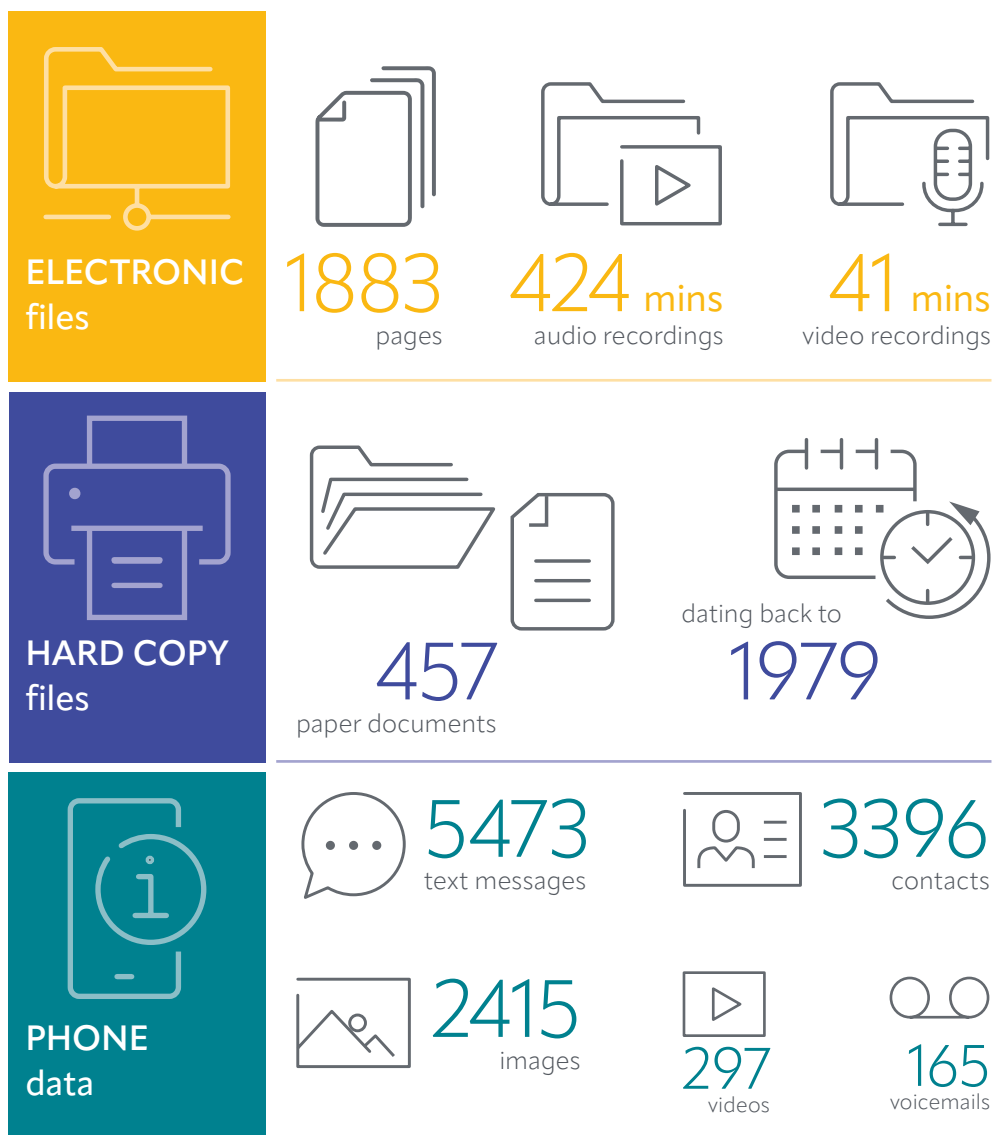
# Documentary and other material

Tasmania Police shared relevant material in its possession within the first weeks of the Independent Review commencing which is currently being considered and analysed in the context of the Terms of Reference.

A comprehensive breakdown categorising the types of documentary and data material considered by the Independent Review will be included in the final report.

Information disclosed to date includes the following:

**FIGURE 2:** Types of documents and data collected for the purpose of this review



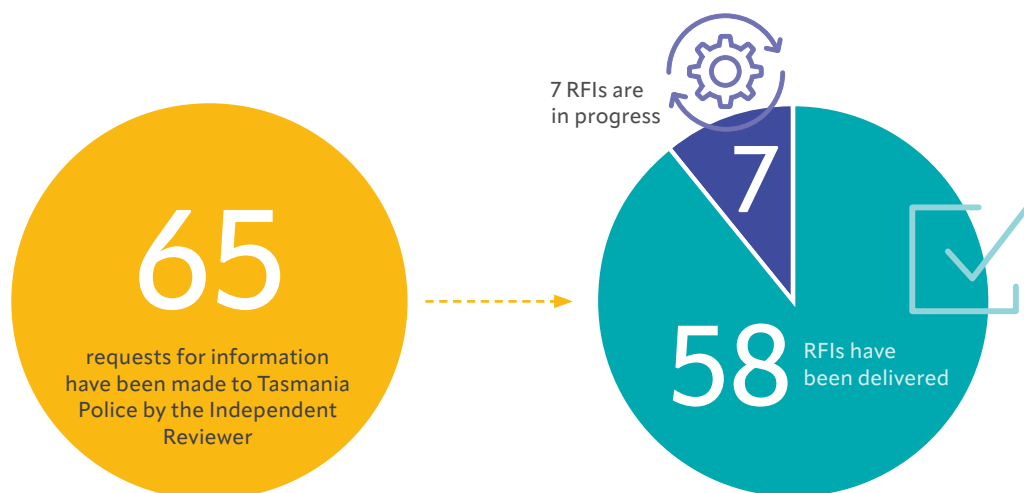
# Referrals

Despite the Independent Review centring around Paul Reynolds, people with information about grooming and/or sexual abuse related to other Tasmanian Police officers have also participated in private sessions. In that context, three referrals have been made to Tasmania Police to date (relating to two retired police officers and one deceased officer). Another referral was made in relation to a person who is not a police officer.

## Requests for information

As detailed above, a vast amount of material has already been disclosed for consideration of the Independent Review. In addition to that disclosure, further requests for information (RFI) have been made of Tasmania Police in the form of police holdings, files and information. This is not unusual in a review of this kind, because the relevance of certain material only becomes apparent as a review advances. For example, requests for reports, disclosures or communications have been sought based on information provided to the Independent Review by participants in private sessions. Other information has been sought based on leads or 'springboard' evidence.

**FIGURE 3: Reviewer requests to Tasmania Police for information**



Responses to RFIs by Tasmania Police have been immediate, or delivered as soon as is practicable, noting that some information requested stems back over more than three decades. No request for information has been refused or deferred.

# Initial observations – emerging themes

The evidence gathering stage of the Independent Review is approximately mid-way, with much work still to be done. Despite this, it has become apparent even at this juncture that Paul Reynolds groomed his victims, their parents and the small communities they lived in.

He was a once-respected police officer within the community, coached football, umpired basketball and at the time of his suicide, was the North Tasmanian Football Association President. He was generally perceived to be a *"larger than life"* personality and well known to many. One victim-survivor described Paul Reynolds as *"just the greatest groomer. He was so charismatic everyone wanted to be around him."*

## Independent complaints mechanism

Participants have told the Independent Review that it was this public perception of Paul Reynolds that made it near impossible to speak out about the grooming and sexual abuse they had been subjected to as teenage boys. *"Who would believe me?"* was the view of one victim-survivor from over 30 years ago, whereas another historical victim-survivor said *"I wouldn't even have known who I could report to. Who polices the police?"*

This contributed significantly to Paul Reynolds' ability to engage in inappropriate and entirely unacceptable conduct towards teenage boys and for it to go largely unreported for many years.

It is important to note that Tasmania Police has taken extensive steps to remedy the reporting gap that existed historically and that the pathways for confidential and safe reporting today are very different to those in 1988. This is evident from the insights of former and serving police officers participants.

Despite the complaints handling processes having evolved significantly in recent years, particularly in light of the COI findings and recommendations, the Independent Review will continue to examine how these systems can be strengthened. Specifically, participants have stressed, in the context of grooming and sexual abuse, the need for the actual and perceived independence of the complaints handling processes and protections for any person who wishes to report including members of the public.

## Power imbalance

Participants have spoken of the power imbalance felt because Paul Reynolds was a police officer, but also due to his position in sport. Private sessions have revealed that in the 1980's, Paul Reynolds used his position as a basketball umpire on Tasmania's west coast to groom and sexually abuse his victims and in later years, through rural football clubs in Tasmania's north-west. Evidence considered by the Independent Review shows that Paul Reynolds used football as an initial conversation-starter with teenage boys, progressing to grooming, explicit messaging in the form of text and photos and in some instances, physical sexual abuse.

*"I wouldn't even have known who I could report to. Who polices the police?"*

## A pervasive code of silence

Participants have noted that historically, a culture of silence prevailed within the Tasmanian policing community. This is not an unusual nor new phenomenon and has appeared in reviews of law enforcement bodies nationally and internationally, also referred to as a 'blue wall of silence'.<sup>2</sup> Although this attitude is changing through awareness, education, organisational transparency and individual accountability, there is still some way to go. The final report will detail these changes and identify any gaps.

One emerging theme raised by numerous former and current serving police officers was the lack of transparency regarding Paul Reynolds' alleged criminal conduct at the time of his death. Participants expressed disappointment at learning of the reason for his suicide for the first time five years after his death, via the coronial report. Participants voiced their dismay at having attended a full police funeral for Paul Reynolds when it was known that he was under investigation for criminal conduct towards young males.

The apology of Commissioner Adams for holding a police funeral has been reflected on positively by those participants who have spoken about it, however some questioned why it came five years after the funeral and not immediately afterwards, when the Professional Standards investigation was closed.

## Next steps

This interim report provides an overview of engagement with the Independent Review, progress to date and some early observations. The information gathering phase will continue until the end of April 2024, with the intention for the final report to be presented to the Police Commissioner at the end of June 2024. It will include detailed findings drawn from the de-identified accounts of people who have contributed to the Independent Review and analysis of all files, data and documents provided to the Independent Review.

<sup>2</sup> See for example the Baroness Casey Review (UK, 2023), final report *An independent review into the standards of behaviour and internal culture of the Metropolitan Police Service* available at <https://www.met.police.uk/police-forces/metropolitan-police/areas/about-us/about-the-met/bcr/baroness-casey-review/>.

# Feedback

Some participants have spontaneously provided feedback about their experience of engaging with the Independent Review. Those who have done so indicated that their experience has been safe and respectful, that they are pleased that the Independent Review is being conducted and have confidence in its independence. Many have also expressed appreciation for the opportunity to share their stories and have encouraged others to take part.

One participant who was a victim of sexual abuse at the hand of a former police officer other than Paul Reynolds told the Independent Review that sharing a lived experience felt like a *"40 year old burden being lifted from my shoulders"* while another victim survivor who shared their experience in relation to Paul Reynolds said that doing so *"has given me a little bit of closure."*

*"... 40 year old  
burden being  
lifted from my  
shoulders..."*

# Conclusion

The accounts of grooming and abuse as told by the victim-survivors, their families and observers are harrowing, shocking and devastating. The betrayal of trust felt by so many is evident. What is also shocking is that Paul Reynolds' conduct continued for over three decades despite it being known or suspected that Paul Reynolds was, at the very least, interacting inappropriately with teenage boys.

What is clear from the accounts of former and serving police officers is that the shock reverberates throughout the Tasmania Police community. It shows the dark side of those people in our community who use their position of trust and power to groom and abuse children and young people.

It is important to note and acknowledge the courage and commitment of the many police officers who serve the Tasmanian community, who put their lives at risk to protect others and who take pride in the work they do. The conduct of Paul Reynolds must not overshadow the noble contribution so many Tasmanian police officers have made, and continue to make, to our community.

Finally, the Independent Reviewer encourages victim-survivors, their families, observers, bystanders, former and serving police officers and any other person who wishes to be heard to come forward.



## More information

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Email the Independent Reviewer at  
[submissions@weissindependentreview.tas.gov.au](mailto:submissions@weissindependentreview.tas.gov.au)