

COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO DNA PROJECT 13

Commissions of Inquiry Act 1950

SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE OF VANESSA KATE IENTILE

Background

1. Vanessa Ientile has provided two statements to this Commission of Inquiry on:
 - (a) 24 October 2023; and
 - (b) 26 October 2023.
2. After providing her statements, Ms Ientile was provided copies of the statements of the other witnesses who have been asked to provide evidence in this Commission of Inquiry. The other statements provided to Ms Ientile included the statements of Mr Thomas Nurthen, Reporting Scientist, Forensic Biology Division, Forensic Science Queensland and Dr Kirsty Wright, Contractor with the Australian Defence Force and a former Reporting Scientist and Senior Scientist with Queensland Health.

Handwritten meeting notes (exhibits TN-29 and TN-30 of Thomas Nurthen's statement dated 25 October 2023)

3. In his statement, Mr Nurthen says at paragraph 89 that:

“The draft recommendations [in the 2008 Report] do not accord with the view I expressed to Vanessa Ientile prior to Project 13 going live. My view was that we were not ready to go live because the yields from the Automated DNA IQ Protocol were too low at the time. My concern was that the yields would not be as sensitive to extract lower amounts of DNA. Based on my review of my records, I expressed my view to Vanessa Ientile at our weekly project update meetings, including on 9 October 2007 and 16 October 2007.”
4. Exhibited to Mr Nurthen's statement, at TN-29 and TN-30, are handwritten notes of the weekly meetings that were held between Ms Ientile and Mr Nurthen on 9 and 16 October 2007.
5. Ms Ientile will say that she believes the handwritten notes that form TN-29 and TN-30 are contemporaneous notes she made during two project update meetings she held with Mr Nurthen on 9 and 16 October 2007.
6. Ms Ientile will say that due to the passage of time, being more than 16 years, she has no independent recollection of what was discussed at her meetings with Mr Nurthen on 9 and 16 October 2007.

7. Ms lentile will say that in the absence of any independent recollection of the meetings that were held on 9 and 16 October 2007, she relies solely on the content of the brief handwritten notes she prepared to inform her of what was discussed.
8. Ms lentile will say that her handwritten notes indicate that the issue of yield was raised at the meetings held on 9 and 16 October 2007.
9. Ms lentile will say that in relation to TN-29 that was prepared in relation to the meeting on 9 October 2007:
 - (a) the first entry in the note indicates that she had been informed of lower yield for the automated method in comparison to the manual method;
 - (b) the actions noted "*VH¹ to contact Promega*" indicate that at the meeting, a discussion had taken place in relation to what actions were being taken by the project team relating to this issue; and
 - (c) she believes the note under the Action Status section, "*Impact on going live*" may indicate an acknowledgement that the outcomes of the actions being taken may result in reconsidering when the automated procedure would be implemented.
10. Ms lentile will say that in relation to TN-30 that was prepared in relation to the meeting on 16 October 2007:
 - (a) the record indicates that a further discussion took place between Thomas Nurthen and her about yield and that the results using the automated process were 50% lower than the manual process and the actions listed indicate that the project team were continuing to work on this issue; and
 - (b) she believes the note in the last two columns reads, "*need to address 'contam' issue and yield but need to consider implementation then optimisation*" and that this was the outcome of a discussion, but she does not recall the context or how this was reached.
11. Ms lentile will say that due to the passage of time, she does not recall exactly what was being referred to in using the term "yield." Ms lentile will say that it may have referred to quantitation results or the amount of DNA (ng) in the DNA extract, or it may have referred to a comparison of peak heights in the electropherograms from the different extraction techniques. Peak heights above the accepted laboratory thresholds would be considered acceptable.

¹ being a reference to Dr Vojtech Hlinka, Scientist

12. Ms lentile will say that she recalls that the intention of the automation project was to use automated platforms for as much of the sample preparation steps as possible (including DNA Extraction, pre and post PCR set up). The manual DNA extraction process at the time was Chelex extraction. It was demonstrated in other projects completed as part of the automation project that the DNA IQ protocol performed manually was more sensitive than Chelex.
13. Ms lentile will say that she does not recall the specific details of any conversations relating to the comment on TN-29, "*cont plates looks like it cannot confirm source*". Given the multiple incomplete draft versions of the Project 13 report, Ms lentile will say she believes that she cannot comment on the specific details of any contamination or unexpected results that occurred during the validation.
14. Ms lentile will observe that while Mr Nurthen appears to have raised some concerns with her on two occasions in October 2007 about yield levels, it appears that, on Mr Nurthen's own evidence, those concerns resolved by 2009 (see paragraph 97(b) of Mr Nurthen's statement). That is, it appears that the optimisation that was referred to in the notes occurred, although Ms lentile of course left in August 2008 so is not in a position to comment further on that.
15. On the basis of the material that Ms lentile has reviewed as part of her preparing for this Commission of Inquiry (including Mr Nurthen's statement) it seems that optimisation did take place, including as part of Projects 22 and 27. Project 22 dealt with off deck lysis and the results compared quality control samples from before off deck lysis to samples as part of off deck lysis method testing and showed an average increase in DNA concentrations from 0.27ng/uL to 1.22ng/uL. Project 27 appears to have been rolled into the reimplementation process.
16. Since preparing her statements Ms lentile has been given access to some of her emails from the relevant time. Attached to this document is an email chain and an attached information sheet (**Attachment 1**). The email chain suggests that the yields from the automated process were the same or slightly worse than those from the Chelex (manual method). Given the discrepancy that had been identified between that position and the graph in the information sheet, it appears that Ms lentile sent an email requesting that the issue be resolved (**Attachment 2**). The version of the email chain Ms lentile has been provided with does not show who she sent the email to. She expects it would have been to Mr Nurthen or possibly to Mr Muharam. She has no recollection of what happened after that and no further information.
17. Ms lentile notes that she is trying her best to piece together what occurred from limited material with limited time.

Memorandum to DNA Analysis dated 14 July 2008

18. In paragraph 48 of the statement of Dr Kirsty Wright dated 23 October 2023, she refers to a memorandum from Ms lentile to the DNA Analysis team dated 14 July 2008 concerning DNA IQ extractions (**Memorandum**). the Memorandum, Ms lentile stated:

“Automated DNA IQ extractions were introduced in October 2007, after an extensive validation process.”

19. Dr Wright says that the statement made by Ms lentile was incorrect as “project 13 definitely was not an ‘extensive validation’”.
20. Ms lentile will say that while she does not have an independent recollection of the Memorandum or the statement that Dr Wright has taken issue with, she believes that the statement in the Memorandum referring to “*an extensive validation process*” was in reference to the entire automation project, not just Project 13. This is because prior to the implementation of Project 13 in October 2007, six other projects relating to automation had been commenced in 2007, including Projects 1, 2, 4, 5, 6 and 11 and a lot of the work that was being undertaken in relation to these projects was being performed concurrently.
21. A list of the projects related to the automation project was recorded in the Change Management Register (**Register**). The Register was included as Exhibit JH-3 to the statement by Justin Howes in the first Commission of Inquiry and exhibited as VI-5 to my statement dated 24 October 2023 to this Commission of Inquiry (**Attachment 3**).
22. This summary of evidence has been provided at short notice and Ms lentile is continuing to review documents provided to her. Ms lentile reserves the right to supplement this response if necessary.

Date: 28 October 2023