



## Scott Morrison, senators and AFP told of historical rape allegation against Cabinet Minister

Four Corners / By Louise Milligan

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Scott Morrison has been sent a letter detailing an historical rape allegation against a senior Minister. *(ABC News: Tamara Penniket)*

Australian Federal Police have been notified of a letter sent to Prime Minister Scott Morrison detailing an alleged historical rape by a Cabinet Minister in the federal government.

The letter requests urgent action be taken by the Prime Minister to investigate the alleged rape, which occurred in 1988 before the accused man entered politics.

### Key points:

- A letter detailing a historic rape allegation against a Cabinet Minister has been sent to the

Federal Police.

The letter was forwarded to AFP Commissioner Reece Kershaw by Labor's Leader in the Senate, Penny Wong, and Greens Senator Hanson-Young, who were also recipients of the letter.

Four Corners understands that Commissioner Kershaw has briefed South Australia Police and NSW Police.

The letter, shared with Four Corners by a friend of the complainant, attaches a detailed statement prepared by the complainant for her lawyer about the brutal rape she alleges took place.

## NSW Police set up strike force

Last year, NSW Police set up a strike force with a view to commencing an investigation into the historical allegations about the Cabinet Minister after the woman came forward.

Strike Force Wyndarra was established by police after she reported in Sydney in February 2020 to detectives from the NSW Police Child Abuse and Sex Crimes Squad that she had been raped by the man.

The woman had engaged a lawyer and told many friends about the allegation, but took her own life in June last year.

In a statement to Four Corners on Friday, Ms Hanson-Young said: "This morning I received information regarding a disturbing and a very serious allegation of a criminal nature against a senior member of the government.

"Following the advice given to the Prime Minister by the AFP Commissioner this week, I have spoken with the Police Commissioner today, who is now taking steps in relation to this information."

Senator Wong told Four Corners in a statement on Friday that she had notified NSW, SA Police and the AFP, and would assist in any investigations.

"I have also written to the Prime Minister and Senator Hanson-Young to outline the steps I have taken,

## Prime Minister

- The alleged offence took place in 1988 before the man entered politics
- The matter has been referred to the AFP

### If you or anyone you know needs help:

- [Lifeline](#) on 13 11 14
- [Kids Helpline](#) on 1800 551 800
- [MensLine Australia](#) on 1300 789 978
- [Suicide Call Back Service](#) on 1300 659 467
- [Beyond Blue](#) on 1300 224 636
- [Headspace](#) on 1800 650 890
- [ReachOut](#) at [au.reachout.com](https://www.reachout.com.au)

following receipt of this anonymous letter," Senator Wong said.

"It is my hope that appropriate action is taken to examine the allegation."

■ [Care Leavers Australasia Network \(CLAN\)](#) on 1800 008 774

A spokesperson for the Prime Minister's Office said in a statement: "As per the AFP Commissioner's instruction, any complaints or allegations of this nature made to anybody — whether they're parliamentarians or journalists — should be referred to the AFP.

"As the AFP Commissioner outlined in advice to all parliamentarians on February 25, 2021, rereporting to the police is the way to ensure any alleged crimes are properly investigated."

South Australia Police are investigating the circumstances of the woman's death for the state coroner.

Four Corners has seen the woman's statement and has spoken to many friends of the complainant whom she told about what she alleged took place and who knew her at the time of the alleged incident.

The letter urges the Prime Minister to set up an independent parliamentary investigation into the matter, similar to that commissioned by the High Court into allegations against former Justice, Dyson Heydon.

"When news of [the complainant's alleged] rape becomes widely known to the public (as it most likely will), legitimate questions will be asked as to who knew what, when they knew and what they did," the correspondent wrote.

"This is occurring today in relation to Brittany Higgins.

"In [the complainant's] case, the loss of respect for our political institutions will be exacerbated by the aggravating factor of [the accused perpetrator's seniority].

"There will be considerable damage to community perceptions of justice... and the parliament when this story becomes public if it is simultaneously revealed that senior people (like yourselves) were aware of the accusation but had done nothing...

"Failing to take parliamentary action because the NSW Police cannot take criminal action [due to the complainant's death] would seem like wilful blindness."

## **Wong, Turnbull also made aware of allegation**

Senator Wong, who was made aware of limited detail surrounding the woman's allegation last year by the complainant herself, contacted South Australia Police to offer her assistance in the coronial investigation when she discovered the complainant had died.

The woman had also written in 2019 to former prime minister Malcolm Turnbull, and he too wrote to South Australia Police with his knowledge of the allegation upon learning of her death.

South Australia Police had originally referred the woman to their NSW counterparts because she alleged the incident occurred in Sydney. SA Police are currently preparing a report into the circumstances of her death for the state's coroner, including her early release from a psychiatric institution in Melbourne.

The coroner will then determine whether to conduct a public inquest into her death.

The woman alleged the sexual assault took place in Sydney in 1988, long before the man's political career commenced.

NSW Police provided a statement to the ABC about the case:

"In February [2020], NSW Police received a report of alleged historic sexual abuse. Inquiries were commenced by officers from the Child Abuse and Sex Crimes Squad under Strike Force Wyndarra."

## **COVID-19 outbreak delays investigation**

Detectives from Strike Force Wyndarra were due to travel to Adelaide to take the woman's formal statement in March 2020 but their trip was postponed after the COVID-19 outbreak erupted and state borders were closed.

Friends of the woman, who had years earlier been diagnosed with bipolar disorder, say her mental health deteriorated in the weeks before she took her life. She had made previous suicide attempts.

The NSW Police statement said: "On Wednesday 24 June 2020, the body of a 49-year-old woman was located at a home at Adelaide by South Australia Police (SA Pol)."

The day before she took her life, the woman informed NSW Police that she no longer wished to proceed with the investigation.

She would have turned 50 this week.

"NSW Police understand that reporting sexual assault can be distressing and traumatic for victims — and it (is) always the choice of an individual whether to proceed with an investigation or not," the statement said.

## **'This is my story, plain and simple'**

The woman's death means a criminal investigation into the politician can no longer proceed because the allegation cannot be tested.

The woman, who had been a brilliant and celebrated student at the time of the alleged incident, had prepared a long statement for her solicitor at the end of 2019.

"This is my story, plain and simple. It's not pretty, but it is mine," she wrote in the statement.

"And I stand by it, every single word and image in this document is true."

In her statement, the woman alleged she had been anally raped by the man when she was aged 16.

"All I really want, in the end, is for this to have been reported to the NSW Police Force and to know that a copy of this document, and a transcript of any interview they might do with me, is in their archives...

"If this story does become public knowledge, I hope that it will encourage other women to come forward.

"Not for me, but for themselves... I also hope that other people who have endured similar traumas, should these facts become public knowledge, will feel less alone."

The woman had told numerous friends who had become leaders in business, politics, the law and the arts and the ABC has spoken to many of them.

"She was caught on a jag, in a very specific era, around a very specific incident. That really seemed completely consuming and completely debilitating to her," one friend told the ABC.

"She was consumed with a trauma which she told me, deeply and consistently, was as result of an assault that had occurred, early in 1988, and her life at that point was really devoted to exploring how she could get some kind of justice, accountability and peace from that."

In the months before her death, the woman had attended a psychiatric clinic in Melbourne.

"There were many of us that were willing to support and help her carry that burden to the extent that we could. And ultimately, of course, we couldn't do everything we hoped," the friend said, crying.

Another friend, who had been helping the woman find rape support counselling and who has also come forward to NSW and South Australia Police to assist with their investigations, said the woman had been frustrated because COVID had delayed police from flying from Sydney to see her in Adelaide to carry out their investigations.

"[I feel] enormous sadness," the friend said.

### **Sexual assault support services:**

- [1800 Respect national helpline](#): 1800 737 732
- [Lifeline \(24 hour crisis line\)](#): 131 114
- [Beyond Blue](#): 1300 224 636

A third friend told the ABC it was "such a waste".

"A beautiful, clever, young woman with so much potential has a life squandered and a life ended far too early," he said.

In a statement, South Australia Police told the ABC that a full report into the woman's death is being prepared for the coroner.

"It is not completed yet and there is no timeframe provided. SAPOL will not be making any further comment as this is a matter for the coroner."

***Editor's note (31/05/2021): On 26 February 2021, the ABC published an article by Louise Milligan. That article was about a letter to the Prime Minister containing allegations against a senior cabinet minister. Although he was not named, the article was about the Attorney-General Christian Porter. The ABC did not intend to suggest that Mr Porter had committed the criminal offences alleged. The ABC did not contend that the serious accusations could be substantiated to the applicable legal standard – criminal or civil. However, both parties accept that some readers misinterpreted the article as an accusation of guilt against Mr Porter. That reading, which was not intended by the ABC, is regretted.***