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ACTP

**Title** Investigation Update Op COVINA – Allegation of sexual assault  
Australian Parliament House**Background**

On Friday 22 March 2019, members of staff for the Hon Linda Reynolds, Senator for Western Australia, Minister for Defence industry, participated in after work drinks at The Dock bar in Kingston and a bar in Civic, in the ACT.

At the end of the evening, a young female staff member, Ms Higgins, was assisted into the rear of an Uber vehicle, by a male colleague, Mr Bruce Lehrmann. Ms Higgins provided her address to her colleague under the belief she would be transiting to that location.

Mr Lehrmann allegedly instructed the Uber driver to take them both to APH, where he escorted the intoxicated Ms Higgins to the Minister's Suite and engaged in non-consensual sexual intercourse with her. He is then alleged to have left her naked, in an unconscious state, where she was located by cleaning staff the following morning.

On Monday 1 April 2019, Ms Higgins contacted the AFP Protection Liaison (PL) - APH with the assistance and support of the Chief of Staff. Ms Higgins was not willing to participate in a formal statement after the investigation and court process was explained to her, for fear of further reputational impact.

A discreet internal enquiry by Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS) was commenced due to the alleged breach of security in respect to both parties access to the Parliamentary Suite. As a result of the above, both individuals were questioned by the Chief of Staff with Mr Lehrmann's employment subsequently terminated.

The sexual assault allegation was subsequently referred to SACAT for further investigation on Thursday 4 April 2019. PL-APH continued to provide investigational support and liaised with DPS with regard to sign in sheets and relevant CCTV footage.

On Monday 8 April 2019, a 'Meet and Greet' was conducted with Ms Higgins, SACAT investigators and counsellors from the [REDACTED] at Winchester Police Centre.

On Saturday 13 April 2019, Ms Higgins confirmed she did not wish to proceed with the investigation and declined the opportunity to provide a formal statement in relation to the matter. In respecting the wishes of Ms Higgins, the investigation was subsequently finalised on Wednesday 11 December 2019, following enquiries to obtain and secure perishable CCTV evidence.

On Friday 5 February 2021, Ms Brittany Higgins contacted the Australian Federal Police (AFP) via email, and subsequently attended Belconnen Police Station, where

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she requested to speak with investigators from the ACT Policing (ACTP) - Sexual Assault and Child Abuse Team (SACAT). She requested to speak with SACAT investigators in relation to progressing an investigation regarding a historical sexual assault initially reported in 2019.

During this interaction, Ms Higgins informed police she was sexually assaulted in the Defence Minister's office in 2019 by a senior staff member. She also disclosed allegations of misconduct involving Commonwealth Departments and High Office Holders.

On Saturday 6 February 2021, Ms Higgins and her partner, David Sharaz, attended Belconnen Police Station where they met with SACAT investigators for the purposes of a 'Meet and Greet'. During the meeting, Ms Higgins and Mr Sharaz provided further information to police about the alleged sexual assault and the allegations of misconduct involving Commonwealth Departments and High Office Holders.

Ms Higgins informed investigators she had been speaking with News Corporation journalist, Samantha Maiden, for the past two years. Ms Maiden will be releasing a news article about the incident within the next week and a half. The article will report that a sexual assault incident was reported to police but will focus on the allegations of misconduct involving Commonwealth Departments and High Officer Holders.

Ms Higgins has already participated in a recorded interview with television presenter Lisa Wilkinson in relation to this matter and it will be aired on 'The Project' on Monday 15 February 2021. Both Ms Higgins and Mr Sharaz anticipate the AFP will receive media enquiries regarding the incident and wanted to ensure the sexual assault investigation was 'active' when those media enquiries were made with the AFP, to support the allegations made by Ms Higgins.

Ms Higgins provided investigators with a USB storage device she stated contained records in support of her allegations regarding the sexual assault and the subsequent misconduct involving Commonwealth Departments and High Officer Holders. These records are believed to include covert audio recordings made by Ms Higgins.

Ms Higgins was not willing to provide investigators with a formal statement in relation to the allegations until the media stories had been published. She indicated she would be spending time interstate during the next few weeks and requested investigators make contact with her again on Wednesday 24 February 2021 to discuss a suitable future date for a formal statement to be provided.

In accordance with the victim-centred approach adopted in sexual assault investigations, Ms Higgins was informed that investigators would not commence overt enquiries, such as approaching potential witnesses, without a formal statement from her and subsequent confirmation that she was willing to proceed with the police investigation.

### Investigation Update

On 24 February 2021 Ms Higgins participated in an Evidence in Chief Interview (ECIC) [REDACTED], Queensland and overt investigational activities commenced. To date the following has been completed:

- Fourteen Records of Conversations (ROC) conducted with key witnesses
- A further twenty seven disclosure witnesses identified
- All CCTV material available obtained and reviewed

#### Legislative restriction

- AFP Covert services utilised to confirm location of suspect interstate
- All APH documentation relating to the incident obtained
- Engagement with ACT Department of Public Prosecutions (DPP) undertaken

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### **Current activity**

- On 14 April 2021 – travelling to [REDACTED] QLD to execute Section 3E Search Warrant and 3LA Order on suspect, Mr Lehrmann
- It is intended to offer an interview to Mr Lehrmann on 15 April 2021
- Follow up inquires as a result of any interview with Mr Lehrmann are anticipated
- Digital analysis of Mr Lehrmann's communication devices

### **Outstanding**

- Additional ROC's to be conducted with identified disclosure witnesses

**Legislative restriction** [REDACTED]

- Preparation of brief of evidence

Forwarded for your consideration

M.Boorman  
Detective Inspector [REDACTED]  
Major Crime  
ACTP Criminal Investigations

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