

## **From the NT Independent – Some of these stories are almost beyond belief**

### **Hit-and-run driver who killed Indigenous man related to Attorney-General, 18 Sep 25**

The 24-year-old man who struck two Aboriginal men with his car, leaving one to die as he fled the scene, and who received no jail time this week for the crime, is related to Attorney-General Marie-Claire Boothby, who publicly commented on the matter Thursday morning at a press conference, but did not disclose the familial relation and her clear conflict of interest.

Jake Danby was this week spared jail time for hit-and-run causing death, instead receiving a 12-month community corrections order and five months home detention, despite the court hearing Danby had sent “vile” text messages following the crash in June last year, in which he called the victims “dogs” and “n\*\*\*ers” and bragged that he got them in a “two for one combo”.

In another text he claimed that he was “a Danby, we don’t go to jail”.

Ms Boothby was asked by Sky News at a press conference Thursday morning for her reaction as Attorney-General to the Danby case and the Alice Springs baby assault criminal matter that also recently resulted in no jail time for the convicted offenders.

“I’ll say it, I think it’s appropriate for the DPP to look into those matters,” Ms Boothby said. “Of course, there’s a process that they go through to make that happen, and it is a decision that lies with the ... director of prosecutions.”

Ms Boothby made no mention that her sister Melinda married Danby’s father in March 2022, which makes Danby her sister’s stepson.

Ms Boothby has previously raised concerns about the extent of her knowledge of the separation of powers after holding a photoshoot in the local courts with Director of Public Prosecutions Lloyd Babb earlier this year, while claiming she wanted to see “all the good work” being done, which left legal observers suggesting the media event gave the impression the prosecutor’s office was not working independently from the government.

The Attorney-General also has a senior adviser in her office who previously worked in the Office of the DPP for Mr Babb.

As Attorney-General, Ms Boothby is the person who recommends judges for appointment, including the NT Chief Justice.

According to Justice Sonia Brownhill’s remarks at sentencing, Ms Boothby’s sister is the person who called the police to tell them that Danby had run over pedestrians in his car, but police could not initially locate him.

Court records show Danby had texted his father – Ms Boothby’s brother-in-law – the evening of the collision, in which he said he had hit two “black fellas” going 80 km/h and “just kept driving”, indicating his car registration still had his father’s address on it, “...so if cops swing past looking for me, just give them my number,” he wrote, adding a thumbs-up emoji.

Other texts following the crash also exhibited the “shocking callous disregard for the welfare of the victims”, Justice Brownhill said.

“It was pretty funny watching them roll around on the road after going over my bonnet and through my windscreen,” Danby wrote in one text.

In another he said “they learnt their lesson now, maybe next time they will use the crossing” and also stated “maybe if I’m lucky I’ll be able to claim his Centrelink for taking out another oxygen thief”.

Still, Justice Brownhill gave Danby no prison time for the crime, while stating that she was “prepared to accept that you are genuinely remorseful for your offending”, based solely on “some insight” Danby provided “the writer of the presentence report”.

In another text, after the crash, he mused about turning himself in.

“I do have to hand myself in but I ain’t getting jail time,” Danby wrote. “I’m a Danby, we don’t go to jail.

“It’s amazing how much lawyers fight for you like it’s life and death when you know you can pay whatever fee they pull out of their ass.”

Justice Brownhill inexplicably also wrote that Danby was “entitled to some lenience as a young offender because young people do not have the same decision-making capacities and judgement as older people”.

Danby was 23 when he committed the hit-and-run.

Ms Boothby defended her public comments on the case and failure to disclose her sister is married to Danby’s father. She did not respond to a question about whether she had provided a character reference for Danby.

“The DPP is a statutory independent office – at no time have I sought to influence their decision making in determining whether they should lodge appeals in either of these two cases,” she said in response to emailed questions. “As I said this morning, I think it is appropriate for the DPP to look into the matters...”

Her office did not respond to a follow-up question asking if they understand the Attorney-General should not be publicly commenting on any cases that involve her family members. Concerns were also raised about the close and important relationship between judges and the Attorney-General, who recommends them for appointment.

## **NT Independent investigative series into five lying cops recognised at media awards, 25 Sep 25**

A special investigation series into five senior NT Police officers who lied to a coronial inquest about the TRG’s racist awards has been recognised at the NT Media Awards for best crime/court reporting of the year, but the matter continues to be ignored by the Chief Minister and the NT Police top brass, who have refused to hold anyone accountable for lying in stat decs and later attempting to destroy evidence.

The NT Independent was recognised for the series, titled “Deception in the NT Police Ranks“, which explored the story behind the five officers misleading the court and the efforts they took to cover it up. The series also exposed that the joint NT Police/ICAC investigation was deeply flawed from the beginning and did not properly investigate the creation of the so-called “Noogudah awards”, or the concerted effort to mislead the court and the public.

But Chief Minister Lia Finocchiaro has previously ruled out taking any action against the five officers, despite the overwhelming evidence against them.

A lot of the awards handed out on Saturday night, including to this masthead, the ABC and the NT News, were for articles focused on dysfunction in the Northern Territory’s law and justice system or bumbling incompetence by another government department.

For the Independent’s series, the award judges raised the issue of the government, the NT Police and the ICAC all attempting to “brush the scandal under the carpet”, which they said was “disgraceful”.

“Chris Walsh and David Wood’s reporting revealed damning information about the special treatment afforded to NT Police officers at the centre of the ‘Noogadah award’ racism scandal,” the judges wrote.

“Walsh and Wood exposed the disgraceful attempts by the force, and the Territory’s integrity agencies, to brush the scandal under the proverbial carpet.

“Walsh and Wood’s reporting was dogged, meticulous and in the public interest, with each story revealing some fresh failure by NT Police, or a public agency, to deal with the scandal in the way they ought to have. Their entry was a clear standout and a worthy winner.”

Walsh said the online paper was honoured to be recognised by the judges, who are media professionals from across the country.

“It was great to be recognised for this investigative series and the issues it raised, but we can’t help but feel disappointed that despite the rest of the country recognising what went on here was wrong, the Chief Minister, the NT Police executive and the Office of the ICAC continue to cover-up serious crimes committed by members of the police force, who are supposed to be enforcing the law and beyond reproach,” he said.

“This matter needs to be resolved so the public can continue to have trust in the NT Police force. If a member of the public had been caught doing what these guys did, they’d be in jail.

“It’s another embarrassment for the Northern Territory on a national stage and goes to a sickening lack of leadership in this jurisdiction.”

### **‘Mind-boggling’: Martin Dole appointed Police Commissioner with no recruitment process undertaken, 9 Oct 25**

Fresh off an “inquiry” into questionable senior police appointments that found serious dysfunction in how senior officers are promoted, including that merit is not the over-arching principle, Chief Minister Lia Finocchiaro has appointed Martin Dole as the next NT Police Commissioner without going through a proper hiring process to seek the best candidates.

Ms Finocchiaro, who is also the Police Minister, made the announcement Thursday morning, two days after she refused to explain why she failed to set up the Justice Blow review into senior appointments as a proper inquiry as she had pledged back in March.

Justice Blow’s report was released last week and included comments that Ms Finocchiaro hindered his powers to properly investigate serious allegations of rampant favouritism, bias in hiring and “undeclared or unmanaged conflicts of interest” by not ordering the review under the Inquiries Act. The unresolved allegations, Justice Blow found, were tearing the police force apart at the highest levels and affecting officers’ morale and the overall culture of the organisation.

Mr Dole’s appointment in 2024 to deputy commissioner by disgraced former commissioner Michael Murphy was among the senior appointments that Justice Blow could not ascertain were filled properly, including that merit was not the over-arching principle in senior promotions.

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After avoiding questions about the flawed "inquiry" that has caused mass uncertainty in the senior ranks of NT Police, and which painted a picture of senior officers constantly at each other's throats and accusing each other of incompetence in their roles, Ms Finocchiaro announced Mr Dole will be the 15th NT Police Commissioner for a four-year term.

A special ceremony to mark his start in the role is scheduled for October 31, that Ms Finocchiaro said was specifically chosen to "mark 29 years to the day he graduated as constable".

"NT Police has faced significant challenges over many years – now it is time to move forward with strong leadership and a clear focus," Ms Finocchiaro said in a statement.

"I have full confidence in Commissioner Dole and look forward to working closely with him to continue driving down crime and improving safety across the Northern Territory, as part of our Crime Reduction Strategy."

She then claimed her CLP Government "backs our police", including through the "highest police pay rates in Australia and a record policing budget".

"The NT Police has secured the best pay deal in Australia, and I believe now have the best Commissioner to take the force forward," Ms Finocchiaro said.

Ms Finocchiaro again made no mention of the unresolved senior recruitment processes that Justice Blow raised in his report.

The report also showed that while Mr Dole, as acting police commissioner, delegated powers to Justice Blow to investigate some matters involving police recruitment, he then hired lawyers to respond to Justice Blow's enquiries into his conduct.

The NT Police Association issued a statement later on Thursday afternoon congratulating Mr Dole on his appointment, but also raised concerns around the lack of a proper recruitment process, especially coming so shortly after the "flawed inquiry", which president Nathan Finn said was "mind-boggling and demonstrates a complete disregard for transparency, accountability and public confidence".

"The men and women of the Northern Territory Police Force have made it clear they have serious concerns about the integrity of senior appointments within our organisation," Mr Finn said.

"This direct appointment does nothing to alleviate those concerns. Perception is reality and this decision undermines the very trust and integrity the government claims it wants to rebuild."

## **Territory's national embarrassment exposed in Four Corners investigation, 7 Oct 25**

The Northern Territory's heavily conflicted and "useless" regulatory authority that oversees Australia's \$50 billion online gambling industry was exposed on ABC's Four Corners program Monday night, which featured NT Racing and Wagering Commission chair Alastair Shields fleeing media questions in an old Mercedes that initially wouldn't start during a hasty getaway.

The program titled 'Losing Streak' examined the lax regulations imposed on the country's online gambling industry and the failure to adequately scrutinise their licencing breaches by the six-member NT commission that has become the de facto national 'part-time' regulator, led by Mr Shields and other current members including Andrew Kirkman's wife Susan Kirkman, recently departed acting ICAC Greg Shanahan's wife Rachel Shanahan, Cindy Bravos, Scott Perrin and Ian Curnow.

The investigative report exposed deep failures by the commission to hold the industry accountable amid predatory practices while also revealing a "cosy relationship" between the industry and regulator, including concerning comments Mr Shields made at a gambling industry forum, in which he allegedly bragged about how members of the NT's racing commission, including himself, owned horses, implying it was industry-friendly.

Former NT director of licencing and executive director of liquor, racing and gaming, Philip Timney was also accused in the program of bragging to industry that the NT had "never cancelled [an online gambling] licence".

"He said, 'we've never cancelled a licence, we can, but never have'," said consumer advocate Lauren Levin. "He said, 'we're unashamedly the racing and gambling jurisdiction and are open for business'."

The program focused on the predatory practices of the industry and the devastating impact it has had on Australians from all walks of life, made all the worse by alleged conflicts of interest with the regulatory body, an alleged pro-industry bias and long delays investigating serious complaints.

The program recounted how the Northern Territory moved years ago to attract online gambling companies with the lowest tax rate in the country, but now takes years to deal with complaints about those companies from across the country.

The racing and wagering commission, which has no real staff members and relies on support staff from Licensing NT, last filed an annual report in 1993 and at some point removed the requirement that its members not own race horses.

The Four Corners investigation found that six of the past 10 commissioners have owned race horses at various times, including Mr Shields and Mr Curnow. Further, Mr Shields admitted earlier this year to attending the Darwin Cup as a guest of online gambling companies and in 2018 disclosed that he had a Sportsbet account and was "a member of a syndicate that has a couple of horses".

Former commissioner Amy Corcoran also owned race horses and declared that her husband owned a share in a horse with Matt Tripp, a major industry player and owner of online gambling companies. Despite the perceived conflict of interest, she did not remove herself from a decision by the commission in relation to one of Mr Tripp's companies.

Ms Corcoran now works for online gambling company Dabble, based in Darwin.

The program quoted independent federal MP Kate Chaney, who sat on a federal parliamentary committee in 2023 chaired by the late Labor MP Peta Murphy that made 31 recommendations to reduce online gambling harms, none of which have been adopted by the federal Labor Government.

She said it was clear that there was a “cosy relationship” between the NT’s racing and wagering commission and the online bookies.

“It seems like it’s a body that’s much more about serving industry than serving the community,” Ms Chaney said.

The Four Corners program also revealed several instances where a bookmaking company was found to have breached its licensing obligations, but none had their licences revoked. The fines imposed for breaches were far less than the money companies made by predatory practices.

“What we found was the commission had very limited powers to be able to compel people to produce documents or to actually attend before the commission, and the hearings were not conducted with a level of professionalism and rigour that you would have anticipated,” said Jason Munstermann, a lawyer representing a man who had filed a complaint against a betting company after being targeted while in a “vulnerable state”.

One of the most explosive moments of the program occurred when journalist Steve Cannane approached Mr Shields outside a racing and wagering commission meeting, asking why it took three to four years for the commission to hear complaints, how many hours he was dedicating to the job and why Ms Corcoran did not recuse herself from the hearing due to her perceived conflict of interest.

But Mr Shields, who was accompanied to his red Mercedes by fellow commissioner Ian Curnow appearing to act as a sort of bodyguard, refused to answer and jumped into the car.

The ignition did not initially turn over as the car stalled. Mr Shields finally managed to get it started and drive off.

Cannane then went to the gambling regulator in Denmark who presented a very different and more professional outfit, suggesting that he had a staff of 150 people, funded properly by the government to review breaches in the industry. The Danish regulator stated that “we’re not allowed to have any conflict of interest” with gambling companies and cannot accept hospitality from a bookmaker.

Mr Curnow was also asked about his ownership of race horses as he made a hasty retreat after Mr Shields’s embarrassing retreat.

He said Cannane “should talk to the minister who appoints people as commissioners around their eligibility”.

Racing Minister Marie-Clare Boothby did not respond to the NT Independent’s questions following the program, including if she intended to reform the commission, or in any way address the multiple perceived conflicts of interest presented and the cosy relationship between commission members and the industry.

Four Corners reported that the NT Government claimed the Department of Tourism and Hospitality was completing a review of potential conflicts of interest within the racing and wagering commission, but Ms Boothby did not elaborate on that or provide any details of the apparent review, including why the Tourism department would be conducting a review into gaming regulation.

*Disclosure: This reporter appeared in the Four Corners program to explain that Mr Shields sits on at least nine boards and commissions in the Northern Territory, including his “part-time” role as chief executive of the Darwin Waterfront Corporation, while raising the issue of where Mr Shields finds the time to fulfil the duties of all his public positions.*