
Pattern Recognition Before Escalation

Submission to the Australian Government
Second Action Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children

Prepared by The Pete Bates Project Pty Ltd

The Pete Bates Project Pty Ltd is an Australian public education platform addressing coercive control and family violence pattern recognition, founded and operated by [REDACTED].

This submission draws on three distinct evidentiary sources. First, aggregated patterns observed across genuine, unsolicited public disclosures received daily through the Project's platforms, from individuals actively navigating police, court, family law, and support service systems in real time. Unlike much of the evidence base informing family violence policy, which is necessarily historical, this data reflects current, live experience of how these systems are functioning for the people inside them today, at a scale the Project believes is uncommon among organisations engaged in this space. Second, findings from finalised Australian coronial inquests and court proceedings, referenced throughout this submission with direct attribution. Third, the founders' own direct lived and professional experience.

[REDACTED] grew up in a household affected by severe domestic violence. At age ten, his father poured petrol on him in an attempt to prevent his mother from leaving the relationship. [REDACTED] subsequently spent fourteen and a half years incarcerated within the Queensland corrective services system, including maximum security environments, giving him direct lived exposure to men convicted of serious violence, including domestic and family violence related offending, and developed a direct understanding of how that behaviour operates and escalates. [REDACTED] has worked professionally as a corrections officer within the Queensland system, bringing an independent, professional perspective on the same population from within the custodial workforce.

Together, these three sources inform the Pete Bates Project's central position: that current systems, across policing, courts, and family services, are structurally calibrated to identify and respond to individual incidents, while dangerous behaviour characteristically presents as an extended pattern developing over months or years. This mismatch between how risk actually develops and how systems are built to detect it is, in the Project's direct experience across thousands of public interactions, the single most consistent and correctable driver of system failure identified in the cases and disclosures referenced throughout this submission.

PRIORITY AREA 1: VICTIM-SURVIVORS

What service or system responses would make the biggest difference to victim-survivors' safety, wellbeing, healing and recovery?

The single most consistently reported barrier the Pete Bates Project observes, across thousands of public disclosures, is not a lack of awareness that something is wrong. It is an inability to translate lived experience of coercive control into language that police, courts, and services are structured to act on. Women frequently describe knowing, often for years, that their situation is dangerous, while simultaneously being unable to explain that danger in a form that results in the response they need. This is not a failure of insight or communication skill on the part of the victim-survivor. It reflects a structural mismatch: coercive control is experienced as cumulative, relational, and often difficult to date precisely, while intake processes across police, courts, and services are overwhelmingly built around discrete, dateable, provable incidents.

The Project's educational resources and public facing work is built specifically to close this gap, and its ongoing uptake and feedback provide a live, continuously updated data source on where this gap is most acutely felt. The consistent themes reported back to the Project include: police responding to a single reported incident without recognising it as part of a longer pattern; family court processes treating years of coercive control as "conflict" or "high conflict separation"; and professionals, including in health and education settings, reading a victim-survivor's visible distress as instability rather than as a proportionate response to sustained danger.

What current or emerging issues should the Second Action Plan address, including in relation to coercive control and technology-facilitated abuse?

Post-separation contact through email, text messaging, and co-parenting applications is a consistently reported and under-recognised continuation of coercive control. This contact frequently satisfies the formal requirements of reasonable co-parenting communication while functioning, for the recipient, as an ongoing mechanism of surveillance, intimidation, and control. Current systems assess the content of individual messages in isolation. They do not assess the pattern, timing, volume, or cumulative psychological effect of contact as a continuing form of coercive control. The Project recommends that guidance and training for family law professionals explicitly address this pattern, rather than treating post-separation digital contact as presumptively benign unless a single message contains an overt threat.

Victim misidentification

The 2015 murder of Tara Costigan by her former partner Marcus Rappell in the Australian Capital Territory illustrates how a system can correctly process every formal step available to it and still fail to identify the true level of danger present. Tara applied for a domestic violence order the day before she was killed. She did what victim-survivors are consistently advised to do. The sentencing judge found she was killed specifically to punish her for seeking that protection. The ACT Coroner's findings, delivered in 2018, found no other entity was causally responsible for her death, but recommended process reform around how and when service of a protection order is communicated to the person protected by it, because service is itself a recognised point of escalated risk. This case demonstrates that formal compliance with every available system step is not, on its own, sufficient to ensure safety, and that the point of legal intervention itself requires active risk management rather than being treated as the point at which risk has been resolved.

PRIORITY AREA 2: PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION

What would make the biggest difference in preventing and ultimately ending violence?

Prevention and early intervention frameworks currently activate predominantly in response to a visible incident or an existing formal record, such as a prior police callout or protection order. The 2005 Father's Day murders of Jai, Tyler, and Bailey Farquharson by their father Robert Farquharson at Winchelsea, Victoria, demonstrate the limitation of this model. Farquharson had no prior domestic violence order, no police callout history, and no record of physical violence against the children's mother. What existed instead was an observable, escalating pattern of possessiveness and resentment following the couple's separation, including a statement made to an acquaintance approximately two months before the murders that he intended to "take away the things that mean the most to her." Two separate juries, following a retrial, found that this pattern, considered as a whole, established premeditated murder. The absence of any formal record prior to the murders was not the absence of risk. It was the absence of any mechanism capable of recognising an escalating pattern that had not yet produced a police-reportable incident.

How can governments, communities, schools, workplaces, online platforms and others better support people to recognise and respond to harmful attitudes and behaviours?

The Pete Bates Project's own experience is directly relevant to this question. Public education content built around verified, court-finalised cases, delivered through direct, accessible short-form video content, has generated substantial organic public engagement, reaching hundreds of thousands of individuals and generating consistent, ongoing direct disclosures from people recognising patterns in their own lives. This indicates that pattern-recognition education is both genuinely scalable and something the public actively seeks out, rather than passively receives. The Project recommends the Second Action Plan consider investment in public pattern-literacy education operating continuously and at scale, positioned as a complement to formal intervention rather than only as pre-incident awareness-raising.

PRIORITY AREA 3: CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN THEIR OWN RIGHT

What would make the biggest difference to improving safety, recovery and wellbeing outcomes for children and young people affected by this violence?

Children living inside environments of coercive control are, in the Project's consistent experience across public disclosures and the founders' own lived and professional backgrounds, highly accurate readers of danger and behavioural pattern, frequently recognising risk well before adults around them, including professionals, identify the same signs as abuse. "I lived it," ██████████ notes directly of his own childhood, "and I knew exactly what was dangerous in that house long before any adult outside it did." Current systems have limited formal

mechanisms for treating a child's own account, or a child's observed behavioural response, as primary evidence of risk, rather than as secondary testimony presumed to be unreliable or shaped by adult influence. The Project recommends greater investment in trauma-informed frameworks that treat children as capable, credible observers of their own environment.

What approaches are most effective in supporting children and young people who are using violence or displaying harmful sexual behaviours to take accountability, change behaviours, and reduce harm?

The Pete Bates Project's position, informed directly by [REDACTED] own lived experience and by [REDACTED] professional experience within the corrections system observing the developmental pathways of adult offenders, is that harmful behaviour in children and young people is frequently a learned response to an environment of control, violence, or unaddressed harm, rather than an isolated individual failing requiring purely individual correction. Responses that address the environment a child has been raised inside, alongside the child's own behaviour, are likely to be both more effective in reducing harm and more just than responses that treat the behaviour in isolation from its origin. This reflects the Project's broader position, applicable equally to adult perpetrators: understanding how dangerous behaviour is formed is not the same as excusing it, and effective prevention requires understanding, not simply consequence.

PRIORITY AREA 4: PEOPLE WHO USE VIOLENCE

What would make the biggest difference in preventing and responding earlier to the use of violence?

Current systems generally treat the granting of a protection order, or another formal legal intervention, as the point at which risk to the victim-survivor has been substantially addressed. Evidence available to the Pete Bates Project, drawn from finalised case findings and from [REDACTED] direct professional experience observing this population within the corrections system, indicates that for a specific and identifiable subset of perpetrators, formal legal intervention functions not as a deterrent but as a loss-of-control trigger, requiring continued and active risk management in the period immediately following, rather than an assumption that safety has been resolved. The Tara Costigan case referenced above provides the clearest available Australian example of this mechanism, supported directly by the sentencing judge's finding on motive.

What approaches are most effective in supporting people who use violence to take accountability, change behaviours, and reduce the use of violence, while focusing on victim-survivor safety?

The Project recommends that risk assessment processes explicitly treat the point of service, notification, or other formal legal intervention as a distinct, heightened-risk period requiring active, resourced follow-up, rather than as the conclusion of the system's response. This recommendation is directly informed by [REDACTED] professional experience within corrections, where the pattern of escalation following loss of perceived control is consistently observable within the offender population.

PRIORITY AREA 5: SYSTEM INTEGRATION AND WORKFORCE

What would make the biggest difference in creating a more coordinated and connected system response for people affected by violence against women and children and other forms of gender-based violence and people using violence?

This is the priority area in which the Pete Bates Project's evidence base is strongest, and where the Project's core recommendation is most direct.

The 2015 murder of Doreen Langham by Gary Hely in Queensland followed more than 20 calls to police across a 15-day period, involving at least 16 separate officers, alongside an existing domestic violence order and documented threats to kill. The subsequent coronial inquest found her complaints were not properly investigated, and described the police response as beset by, in the Coroner's own words, "so many inadequacies." The volume of contact with the system was not the point of failure. The point of failure was the absence of any mechanism connecting more than 20 separate points of contact, spread across 16 different officers, into a single, continuous risk picture attached to one identified perpetrator. Each contact appears to have been assessed, in effect, as a new and separate event.

The ongoing inquest into the 2021 murder of Kelly Wilkinson in Queensland has heard evidence of a formally recorded "high risk" domestic violence flag that never triggered the specialist safety plan process it was designed to activate, and a reported breach of a protection order that was incorrectly logged under an unrelated administrative category, preventing it from reaching the specialist unit responsible for tracking that specific category of risk. This inquest remains ongoing and no findings have yet been delivered regarding responsibility for these gaps; it is referenced here only in relation to the system and information-handling issues already given in evidence, not as a finding of fault.

What evidence, workforce or system gaps should the Second Action Plan prioritise to strengthen implementation and improve outcomes over time?

The consistent pattern the Pete Bates Project observes across both of these cases, and across the majority of system-failure disclosures received directly from the public, is not an absence of information reaching the system. It is a structural failure to connect information that has already been collected, often multiple times, by multiple different people, into a single, continuously updated risk profile attached to a specific individual perpetrator. The Project's core recommendation for this priority area is investment in cross-agency case continuity infrastructure: a mechanism ensuring that repeated contact from the same person, regarding the same alleged perpetrator, across police, courts, and family services, is automatically flagged, consolidated, and presented as a connected pattern to whoever is assessing risk, rather than being assessed, each time, as a new and disconnected incident.

RECOMMENDATIONS SUMMARY

1. **Language and translation support.** Fund the development and distribution of plain-language resources helping victim-survivors translate lived experience of coercive control into terms recognised by police, courts, and services.
2. **Technology-facilitated abuse guidance.** Explicitly train family law professionals to assess the pattern, timing, and volume of post-separation contact as potential coercive control, rather than assessing message content in isolation.
3. **Protection order service as a risk point.** Formally treat the point of service or notification of a protection order as a distinct, heightened-risk period requiring active, resourced follow-up, informed directly by the Tara Costigan coronial findings.
4. **Cross-agency case continuity.** Invest in infrastructure ensuring repeated contact from the same person, regarding the same alleged perpetrator, across police, courts, and family services, is automatically flagged and consolidated into a single connected risk profile, rather than assessed as disconnected incidents.
5. **Child testimony credibility.** Invest in trauma-informed frameworks that treat children's own accounts and observed behavioural responses as credible, primary evidence of risk in their household.
6. **Public pattern-literacy education at scale.** Recognise and invest in public education addressing pattern recognition, delivered continuously and at scale, as a genuinely effective and demonstrably scalable complement to formal, post-incident intervention.