

**SOLICITING TO MURDER –  
JAMES MORRIS**

1. Roseanne Catt did not know James Morris. She is said by him and his sister Sandra Ridgeway to have approached him at about 10.30 pm on Friday 28 July 1989, in the bar of the Taree RSL Club, and said: "Do you want to make some money?" and when he said: "What for?" to have replied "To do a good job on my husband". She mentioned \$10,000 and said "If you kill him you get a bonus" (T 2612, 2613, Ridgeway T 2602). Morris said that he saw her about a week later at K-Mart, when she asked "Did you think about what we talked about?", he replied "I have thought about it", and she said "When can you get it done. I would like it done straight away or as soon as possible". (T 2615).
  
2. Both Morris and Ridgeway said that there was another woman with Roseanne Catt for the first part of the discussion in the club. Morris could not describe her (T 2611), but Ridgeway said she was dark, in her mid twenties, and could be a Maori (T 2601). Ridgeway said the discussion lasted about half an hour (T 2602, 2606, 2608).
  
3. Roseanne Catt was at the RSL Club that night. She had gone with a friend, Lucy Parkinson, who had gathered a group of friends for a birthday (T 3541). Parkinson's description fits that of the woman described by Ridgeway.
  
4. Roseanne Catt denied having spoken to Morris (T 2711), and said she had never seen him before she saw him in the witness box

(T 2710). Lucy Parkinson gave evidence that she knew Sandra Ridgeway and had said hullo to her, but nothing more (T 3543). She had seen Morris sitting at a table (T 3543). He was very drunk (T 3552). Apart from when she and Roseanne Catt got an initial drink on arrival, about 8.30 (T 3551), she had not been with her to the bar, and specifically had never been at the bar with her and Morris, or with her and Ridgeway (T 3543).

5. Ridgeway said that she did not go to the police about the matter because she did not take it seriously (T 2609). Morris said that after the conversation in K-Mart he spoke to Mr Ferguson (from other evidence apparently meaning Bill Ferguson of the Department of Youth and Community Services). While unsure how long afterwards, he said it would have been less than a week (T 2616). Morris had himself been a full time civilian employee of the police force since 28 February 1988 as a community liaison officer (T 2617).
6. Apart from the inherent implausibility of an approach to a stranger in a club, who by that time on his own account had drunk five schooners of beer (T 2610, 2620), to invite him to perform an assassination for \$10,000 plus an unspecified bonus, the jury's consideration was in essence limited to an assessment of the two witnesses on each side.
7. At this enquiry several extra elements have been revealed.
8. On 22 September 1989, Mr Greg Baggs, the District Manager of the Department of Youth and Community Services, wrote a report

on allegations that Morris, in company with a number of Taree policemen, had been involved in sexual intercourse with a number of 13 to 15 year old aboriginal girls (Ex 0000). This was apparently at the aboriginal community at Purfleet, some five kilometres from Taree (H 1200). Baggs' report refers to other reports, by one Les Davis and Bill Ferguson, which have not been produced to the hearing. Ferguson at the current hearing recalled the matter (H 1982).

9. If true, these circumstances placed Morris in a position where he was obviously extremely susceptible to the wishes of police. Morris made his statement to police on 5 September 1989 (Ex YY). The situation as described in Baggs' report had existed for some time. Morris' wife was said to have left him three months previously because of it. The local community at Purfleet was said to be aware of it and to have held a meeting the previous week to decide how to handle it. The document gives the names of a considerable number of people, including one of the girls, with whom enquiries could have been pursued if it had been known before the time of Roseanne Catt's trial.
10. The circumstances in which Morris' allegation was conveyed to the police are somewhat questionable. On the day of Roseanne Catt's arrest, 24 August 1989, Bill Ferguson phoned Sergeant Thomas to find out where the Catt children were (Ex NNNNN para 9). Thomas refused to tell him, and told him that he would be required for questioning. About 11.30 the next morning, Ferguson told Greg Baggs that Morris had told him of being solicited by

Roseanne Catt to kill Barry Catt (Ex UUUU para 38). Baggs passed this on to Thomas that day (Ex NNNNN para 23).

11. If, as his trial evidence indicates, Morris told Ferguson within two weeks of 28 July 1989 (i.e. by 12 August 1989), Ferguson had sat on the information for nearly two weeks. The sequence of events on 24 and 25 August suggests that Ferguson told Baggs only because of the pressure from Thomas. At the current hearing, Ferguson said he had no memory of ever being told such a thing by Morris, and that if told it, he would have remembered it (H 1988-1991).
12. The circumstances overall suggest a reasonable possibility that Morris, apprehensive of trouble because of the aboriginal girls, and looking for an opportunity to generate a favourable attitude to himself from the police, saw that opportunity in the news of Roseanne Catt's arrest, well publicised in the local area, and that the communication between him and Ferguson occurred overnight or on the morning of 25 August.

*Jan Mplomb*