

Snowtown Killer Vlassakis Granted Parole After 26 Years

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James Vlassakis, the youngest of the notorious Snowtown murderers in Australia, has been granted parole after spending more than two decades in prison. The South Australian Parole Board approved his release following a lengthy sentence for his role in one of the country's most gruesome serial killing cases.

Vlassakis, now in his 40s, was convicted for his involvement in four of the 11 murders committed between 1992 and 1999. The killings became known as the “bodies in the barrels” case after police discovered dismembered human remains in plastic barrels stored in a disused bank vault in the town of Snowtown, north of Adelaide.

At the time of his conviction, Vlassakis was 19 years old. He had pleaded guilty and cooperated with authorities, providing key evidence that helped convict the ringleader, John Bunting, and his stepfather and fellow killer, Robert Wagner. As a result of his cooperation, he received a 26-year non-parole sentence, which expired before his parole application was lodged.

The parole board noted that Vlassakis had maintained exemplary behavior throughout his incarceration. According to the board, he had lived under the influence and control of Bunting during the time of the crimes and had since demonstrated remorse and rehabilitation.

However, the decision to grant him parole has not been met without controversy. Victims’ families have voiced strong opposition, arguing that his release is unjustified given the lasting trauma caused by the crimes.

Karen Davies, the sister of one of the victims, expressed her frustration. “No. I don’t think he deserves to come out. I can’t see my brother again, so why is it fair for him to come out and live his life as if nothing’s happened?”

While the parole board has approved Vlassakis’ release, the timeline for his actual discharge remains unclear. The South Australian attorney-general and police commissioner have been given a two-month period to review and potentially contest the decision.

Vlassakis is one of three men convicted in connection with the murders. Mark Haydon, another accomplice who was found guilty of assisting in the disposal of bodies but not of the killings themselves, was released on parole in 2023 after serving 25 years in prison.

The Snowtown murders remain one of Australia’s most chilling criminal cases. The victims, many of whom were targeted due to their perceived vulnerabilities, were subjected to prolonged abuse before being killed. The discovery of their remains shocked the nation and led to a high-profile investigation and trial that spanned years.

Authorities have yet to announce the conditions of Vlassakis' parole or whether any restrictions will be placed on his movement and identity. His reintegration into the community is expected to be closely monitored.