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NSW Police Seek Relatives in 1948 Sea Tragedy

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New South Wales Police are appealing to the public for DNA samples from relatives of five fishermen who vanished in a 1948 sea tragedy, as part of the 2025 Missing Persons Week campaign.

On 15 May 1948, two fishing vessels the *Joyce* and the *Syd* set out separately from Woy Woy and Patonga on the NSW Central Coast. Both boats were struck by severe weather during their trips and never returned. None of the eleven people on board were ever found.

The *Joyce* carried seven colleagues from the Nielsen Slipper Factory: Norman Eric Lester (21), Brian Morris Parsons (56), Robert Hayes (30), Peter Proudfoot (24), Berty Cyril Law (37), Norman John Tolley (25), and Arthur Bowyer (41). The *Syd* was manned by three men and a boy: Hugh Murray (41), Cecil Aubrey Murray (43), Neville Walters (35), and Brian Murray (14).

Despite an extensive search at the time, no wreckage or remains were recovered. In 2020, a human jawbone was discovered on Umina Beach, sparking renewed investigation. However, the remains were identified as belonging to Henry Coleman, a 17-year-old who drowned in 1980.

To date, six relatives of the missing fishermen have voluntarily provided DNA samples. NSW Police are now urging any relatives of Norman Eric Lester, Brian Morris Parsons, Robert Hayes, Peter Proudfoot, or Neville Walters to come forward.

Detective Inspector Paul Fenwick of the Missing Persons Registry said DNA samples could be crucial in linking long-lost remains to families.

“There are 352 unidentified human remains across New South Wales,” Det Insp Fenwick said. “Even after all these years, remains continue to be recovered along the coastline. This DNA could be the key to solving one of these cases.”

Marine Area Commander Superintendent Joseph McNulty echoed the call, emphasising the importance of DNA for rapid identification. “The ocean can preserve evidence for decades. Having family DNA on file gives us a better chance of bringing someone home.”

Missing Persons Week 2025 runs from 3 to 9 August. This year’s theme, *Forever Loved*, aims to highlight the long-term impact missing persons cases have on families and communities.

Anyone with information is urged to contact Crime Stoppers at 1800 333 000 or visit <https://nsw.crimestoppers.com.au>. Information is confidential. The public is reminded not to share tips via police social media platforms.