

Transparent. Unbiased. Yours.

## Snowtown Killer's Parole Sparks Community Fears

August 9, 2025

— Categories: Human Rights



James Vlassakis, convicted in the notorious Snowtown murders, has been granted parole after 26 years, raising concerns about his reintegration into a transformed society.

James Vlassakis, the youngest perpetrator in South Australia's infamous "bodies-in-the-barrels" murders, has been granted parole after serving 26 years of a life sentence for his role in four of the 11 killings between 1992 and 1999. The South Australian Parole Board, in its August 5, 2025, decision, approved his release to the Adelaide Pre-Release Centre for up to 12 months, citing his "excellent" institutional behavior and lack of risk to the community, according to Parole Board Chair Frances Nelson KC, as reported by ABC News. Vlassakis, now in his mid-40s, was 19 when convicted, having been drawn into the crimes by his stepfather, John Bunting, the ringleader.

The parole decision has stirred unease among victims' families and the public, with many questioning whether justice has been served. Nelson acknowledged the victims' pain, stating, "It's common for victims to feel he has been insufficiently punished," but emphasized that the board's role is to assess parole criteria, not sentencing, per InDaily. Vlassakis's testimony was pivotal in convicting Bunting and Robert Wagner, who received life sentences without parole for 11 and 10 murders, respectively. A 60-day review period allows the Attorney-General, Commissioner for Victims' Rights, or Police Commissioner to challenge the decision.

Victims' families expressed profound distress. Ronald Lane, nephew of victim Barry Lane, called the decision a "kick in the face," arguing that Vlassakis's release undermines justice for those brutally killed, as quoted by ABC News. Commissioner for Victims' Rights Sarah Quick noted that the ruling would "bring fresh pain and anger" to those already burdened by trauma. Strict parole conditions include geographic exclusion zones, a curfew, and a ban on contacting victims' families, with Nelson doubting Vlassakis would be allowed to change his name, per The Nightly.

Vlassakis faces a daunting transition after decades in a structured prison environment. Nelson highlighted his need for resocialization, noting, "He spent his formative years in a highly structured environment," per Neos Kosmos. The Snowtown murders, uncovered in May 1999 when police found eight bodies in acid-filled barrels in a disused bank vault, remain a grim chapter in Australia's history, fueling ongoing debate about parole for such crimes.