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**Police delve into church**

*Annexure K*

**JOANNE MCCARTHY**

POLICE could set up a strike force to investigate the Catholic Church's attempted secret defrocking of Hunter pedophile priest **Denis McAlinden** as the number of senior clerics with alleged knowledge of his offending increases.

Northern Region operations manager Inspector Tony Townsend said police were still reviewing church documents submitted by The Herald, but if any investigation required resources beyond a single police command, "we would look at pooling resources and setting up a strike force".

Police could ask the State Crime Command to help if any investigation was prolonged and beyond local command resources, Inspector Townsend said.

He encouraged people with information to contact police.

His comments came as Lake Macquarie crime manager Detective Inspector Dave Waddell confirmed that strike force Georgiana was closed.

It was established in 2008 to investigate Hunter pedophile priest allegations after a series of Herald reports in 2007.

Inspector Waddell, who is reviewing the 1995 McAlinden documents, said: "We're still assessing the information provided to establish what investigation will be undertaken."

A number of potential witnesses contacted The Herald this week in response to reports detailing the attempted secret McAlinden defrocking in 1995, in which the priest was assured his "good name" would be protected despite evidence of serial child sexual abuse.

The attempted defrocking was launched as police charged pedophile priest Vince Ryan and with church knowledge that McAlinden's offending presented "grave problems for the community".

Bishop Malone and senior Hunter priests named in the documents did not respond to any emailed questions.

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