

Commissioner Mal Lanyon APM NSW Police Force

Dear Commissioner Lanyon,

The rules are there for a reason: end illegal strip searches in NSW

From train stations to parks to festivals, public spaces are where people travel to work, see friends, and build community. Everyone should be able to feel safe in these places.

Unlawful strip searches make public spaces less safe. They are inherently invasive and often deeply traumatic, with the heaviest harm falling on young people, First Nations communities, and survivors of sexual violence. Section 31 of LEPR permits a strip search only where an officer reasonably suspects it is necessary, and the seriousness and urgency of the circumstances require it. Suspicion of drug possession does not meet that threshold. The rules are there for a reason.

You took office at a moment of reckoning for strip search practice. In 2025, the Supreme Court confirmed what coroners, the Law Enforcement Conduct Commission, and successive inquiries had warned since 2013: NSW Police have unlawfully strip searched thousands of people. The court found systemic failures in training, supervision, and operational guidance, not isolated misconduct.

NSW Police told the court the problem had already been addressed. The court was not satisfied. Justice Yehia found a 'conspicuous deficiency' in training and monitoring that resulted in a 'flagrant disregard' of people's rights. The Person Search Manual still contains guidance at odds with the law.

You have the authority and opportunity to fix this. We ask you to act now to:

1. Revise the Person Search Manual to make clear that strip searches for suspected drug possession require reasonable suspicion of a supply offence, and that welfare concerns based on suspected possession do not in themselves meet the legal threshold.
2. Reform training so every officer receives regular, scenario-based instruction on the law, including the obligation to have a parent, guardian, or independent support person present when strip searching a young person.
3. Require officers to record the reasons for a strip search on Body Worn Video before it commences.
4. Monitor compliance publicly and hold accountable officers who conduct unlawful searches, and those responsible for training and supervision.

These rules protect the public from unnecessary trauma, your officers from acting unlawfully, and the trust between NSW Police and the communities you serve. They ensure people can attend a festival, ride a train, or walk through a park without fear of being unlawfully strip searched.

You have said publicly that public confidence in policing is a priority. Reforming strip search practice would deliver on that commitment. We would welcome the chance to meet to discuss how this work can move forward.

Yours sincerely,